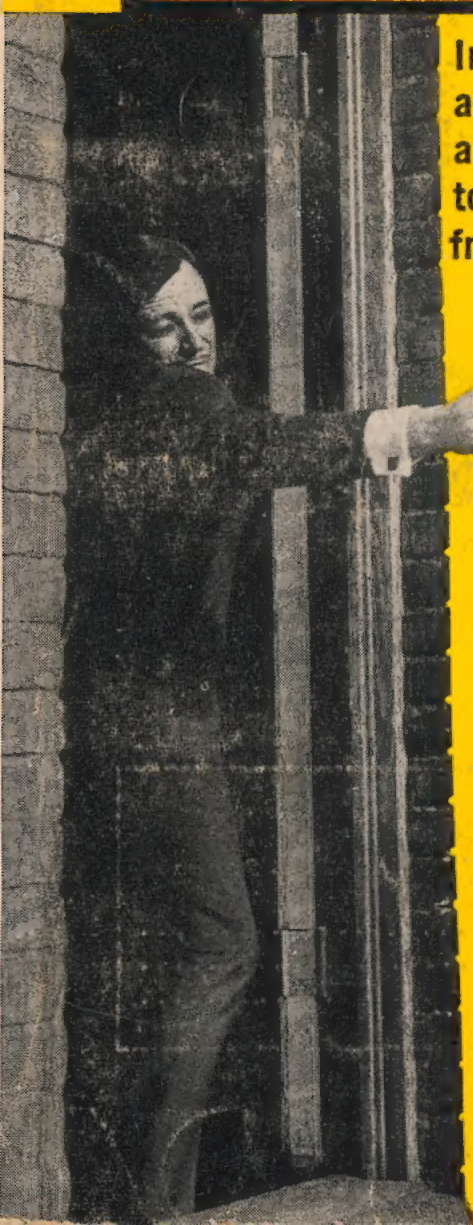
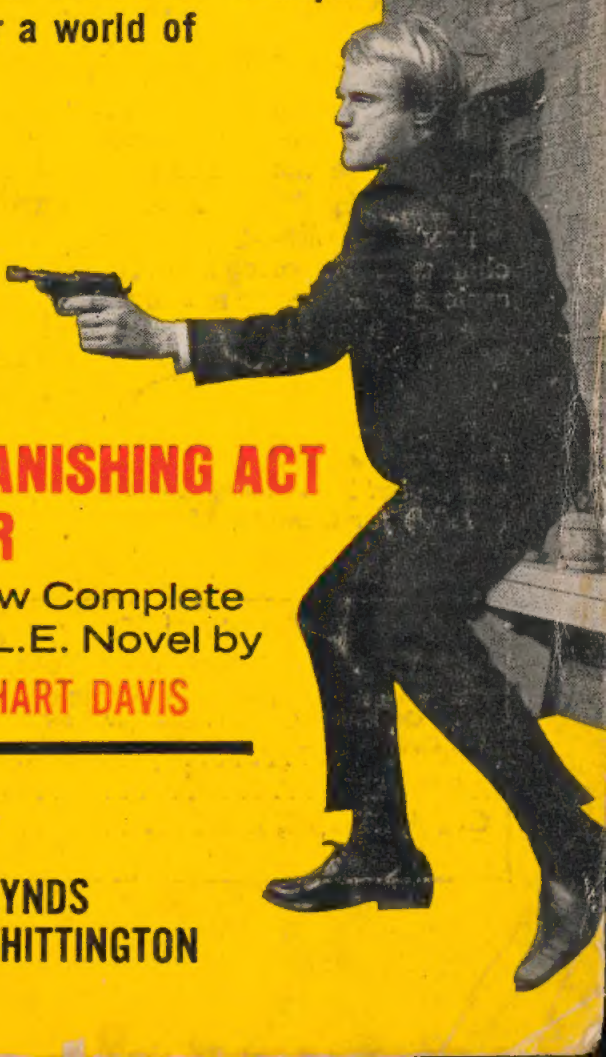
THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

JUNE 50c PDC

NAPOLEON SOLO ★ ILLYA KURYAKIN



Invisibility is their deadly weapon as Wily MORLOCK THE GREAT and fiendish THRUSH conspire to take over a world of free men.



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THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

NAPOLEON SOLO · ILLYA KURYAKIN

JUNE, 1966 Vol. 1, No. 5

NEW FULL LENGTH U.N.C.L.E. NOVEL

THE VANISHING ACT AFFAIR

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

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Misshapen, monster-like, they crouched deep under London and listened to their demoniac leader: "You will take over the Earth after tonight—after the whole men die. For nothing—not even the creatures from U.N.C.L.E.—can stop me from decreeing the end of the world!" . . . . . 2 to 65

TWO EXCITING LONG STORIES

BIER ON THE ROCKS
CHARLES VENTURA 66

A COLLECTOR OF KEYS
TOM H. MORIARTY 110

NEW SHORT STORIES

THE DIRK
DENNIS LYNDS 90

THE ASSASSIN
HARRY WHITTINGTON 100

EASY DOUGH
ED LACY 130

FLY AWAY HOME
JAMES HOLDING 135

TIPOFF
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THE VANISHING ACT AFFAIR

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

Somewhere deep under London, a misshapen monster had decreed the end of the world. Only two men, Illya and Solo, might stop him — and time was running out too fast!

ACT I—TO SEE OR NOT TO SEE

THE MAN limped across the open space between the wooded hills and the armored truck.

A grotesque figure in the twilight—short, heavy, with a twisted leg and thick, shaggy hair that hung down almost to his eyes in front, below his neck in back.

The armored truck, closed and buttoned up, its last pick-up of the day made, started its engine. The loading dock was now deserted, the floodlights out, all personnel of the factory inside.

There was only the armored truck, locked and sealed, and the man limping toward it.

There no one else in sight as the truck began to move slowly out of the narrow driveway of the factory, only the truck and the grotesque figure, limping more rapidly now

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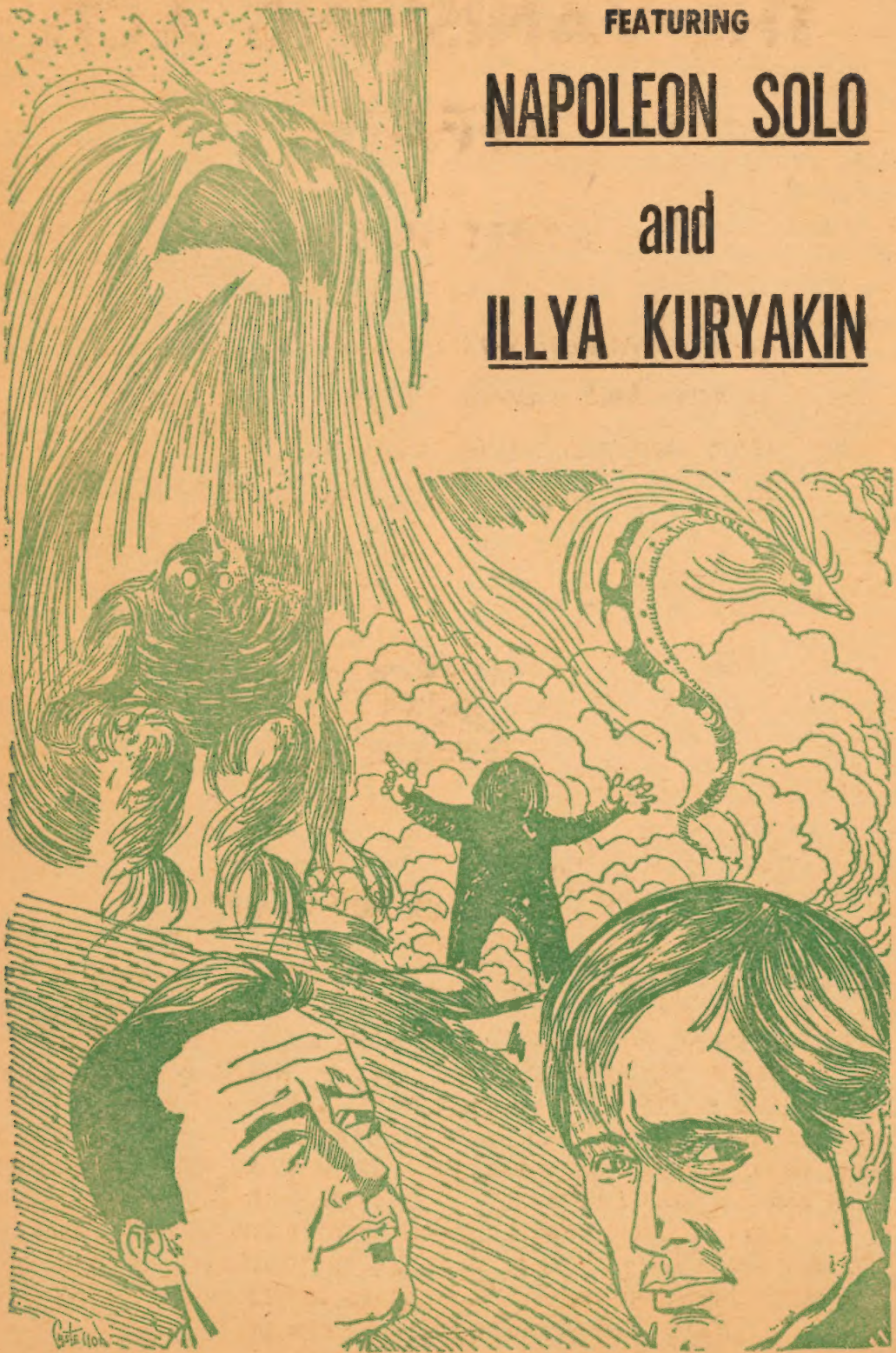
FEATURING

NAPOLEON SOLO

and

ILLYA KURYAKIN



toward a spot where the truck had to pass.

Nothing else moved. But the truck and the hurrying figure were not alone.

High on the side of the wooded hill that overlooked the factory on the highway between Santa Carla and Coopersfield in Southern California, two men crouched and watched the scene below through infra-red binoculars.

They studied the short, shaggy-haired figure limping, and the truck moving slowly down the narrow driveway—the limping man and the truck converging on a point just before the driveway reached the highway.

One of the two men was slender, dressed in a light black sweater and slim black trousers that contrasted sharply with his shock of blond hair that looked as if it had been cut below the edge of a soup bowl. This man's glasses were trained on the slow-moving armored truck.

"They either don't see him, or they don't think he can be of any danger to them," Illya Kuryakin said.

The second man nodded, his glasses trained on the limping figure, which looked even more weird through the infra-red lenses. This man was taller and heavier than his blond companion. A well-built man of average height, with a youthful, half-amused expression on his face.

"They could be right," Napoleon Solo said. "What can he do? The truck is buttoned up like a tank."

"Tanks are hardly invulnerable, Napoleon," Illya pointed out drily.

Napoleon Solo appeared to be thinking this over. His open, handsome face showed little of the sharp and shrewd mind that made him the efficient chief enforcement officer, Section II, United Network Command for Law and Enforcement, better known simply as *U.N.C.L.E.*

"We know he's not even armed," Solo said.

"Do we, Napoleon?" Illya said.

The Number 2 man of Section II (Operations and Enforcement) of U.N.C.L.E. watched the strange scene below and frowned. A loner in a world of organization, Illya's quizzical eyes were often amused; they were not amused now.

Solo, his sharp mind so well-concealed behind the facade of a flippant young executive type, saw his partner's concern.

"We know he left the meeting of the Cult unarmed. Our detectors showed nothing metal, wood or plastic. We've never let him out of our sight since," Solo said.

Illya nodded. "Of course you're right. My gloomy Slavic mind is working overtime. But—"

"But?" Solo echoed quietly in the deepening darkness.

Illya's eyes were glued to the eye-pieces of his infra-red binoculars. "But why has he come forty miles from the Cult meeting to walk

unarmed up to an armored truck?" he said softly.

Then, as if the grotesque figure below had heard the question of the small Russian U.N.C.L.E. agent, the two agents had their answer.

"Look!" Solo cried.

Both men had their glasses trained on the events below.

As the truck reached the point of leaving the driveway, the strange, hairy figure below suddenly rose up from a clump of bushes. The man limped two quick steps to the armored truck, thrust out his hand toward the narrow slit of an air vent, and leaped back.

"Air vent!" Solo breathed.

"Gas?" Illya hissed.

"How would he open the truck?" Solo whispered.

But, below, the limping man seemed to have no intention of opening the truck. The instant the truck had passed him, he turned and limped away into the bushes and across the open area toward the wooded hills. He went as rapidly as he could, without a backward glance.

Then the man did glance backwards, and fell on his face.

The armored truck had not slowed, even after the man had made the motion with his hand toward the air vent. It went on down the driveway, reached the highway, turned—and stopped dead in the center of the highway.

As the two agents watched from the wooded hillside in the Southern California twilight, the doors of the truck opened and the guards jumped out. Four guards, all those in the truck, leaped out, guns ready. They fired as they came out, the long tongues of flames spitting out into the now dark night.

The men from the armored truck fired a withering hail of bullets. They ran and darted all across the road, firing all the time, running for cover. It was a scene of complete battle.

Except that there was no enemy.

The armored guards were firing a deadly hail of bullets at absolutely nothing!

Illya and Solo stared through their infra-red binoculars, and then slowly lowered the glasses and looked at each other.

"Nothing?" Solo said.

"Nothing at all," Illya said. "They are firing as if an army were attacking them, and there isn't anyone."

"Where is our limping friend?"

Illya looked. "Still lying flat. Which means he knew this was go-

The complete novels depicting the amazing adventures of Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin and the rest of the famous cast of characters making up the great organization known as United Network Command for Law and Enforcement—are especially written, entirely brand-new and inspired by the tremendously exciting MGM-ARENA popular television series—"The Man From U.N.C.L.E."

ing to happen. He wanted no part of a stray bullet."

Solo was again studying the armored car and its wildly-firing guards. Now the suave chief agent of U.N.C.L.E. strained to see more clearly through the infra-red lenses.

"Illya!" Solo said suddenly.

Both agents stared again at the guards, who were still engaged in their bloody battle with an enemy who was not there. The guards were down, flat on the highway and motionless. Even as Illya and Solo watched, the last guard, the driver, crumpled to the macadam and lay still.

The weird figure with the long, shaggy hair got up and began to limp rapidly away toward the woods and the small car that had brought him to the factory and the armored truck.

The two agents moved. Each picked up a small, thin attache case.

"You take the truck," Solo said. "I'll follow our limping friend."

"Check. And Napoleon, be careful. There is something very odd happening here."

Solo nodded. The two men vanished like wraiths into the trees on their way down the wooded hillside.

TWO

THE ARMORED truck guards lay on the highway. No traffic passed in the evening on the back road. Illya, cautious, approached the silent men and the empty truck. The guards did not move.

His quick eyes searched the empty road and the dark bushes that bordered it. He saw and heard nothing. No one was near now, and no one had been near when the guards fired their weapons into the twilight, shattering the bushes and trees with bullets.

In the factory building there was light now, faces at the windows, but no one came out. Illya saw, through the distant windows of the factory, a man on the telephone. The police would be here soon, but no one would come from the factory until the police arrived.

He had perhaps fifteen minutes.

Quickly he bent over the fallen guards. They were not dead; there was no mark of any kind on them. They seemed to be in some kind of drugged sleep, and Illya remembered the way the limping man had motioned toward the air vent of the locked armored truck.

He slapped the faces of two guards. Nothing happened. The men neither moved nor groaned. They did not come awake. Illya turned his attention to the armored truck itself.

The doors of the truck were open, and Illya circled it cautiously. There was nothing unusual, no signs of battle. Inside the truck, through the open rear door, Illya could see the cargo—bags of money.

Nothing seemed to have been taken or even disturbed. How could it have been, since Illya and Solo had seen nothing and no one approach the truck? And yet? The guards had fired at *something,* for some reason.

Illya did not believe in magic, but something which defied logic had happened here. Carefully, he climbed into the truck to check the bags. Five minutes later he squatted in the truck and rubbed his chin. The bags were all full. They had not been opened. Nothing at all seemed to be missing.

Why attack an armored truck of money and take nothing? Why drug the guards, force them out into the open to fire at nothing, and take no money? It made no sense at all. But Illya had long ago learned that everything made sense if you knew the key, the—

And then it made sense.

Illya saw them through the open rear door of the truck. Crouched there inside with the bags of money, he looked out through the rear door and saw them coming from the bushes, out of the shadows, pouring into the road.

Thrush!

Of course, THRUSH! Always THRUSH!

There were six of them. They had been lying in wait. But they had moved too slowly. Illya crouched among the money bags, fitted the stock on his U.N.C.L.E. special, and opened fire.

There were ten of them now. They fell screaming all across the road as he fired. But others came on, firing as they came.

* * *

NAPOLEON followed the limping man across the wooded country toward the small car Solo and Illya had trailed from the meeting of the Things To Come Brotherhood. The leader of the only branch of the strange cult in America, the limping man looked like some shaggy mutation of a human being.

But crippled and grotesque as the man was, he moved with amazing agility. Solo scrambled to keep up. The man reached his small car, and glanced quickly behind. He had heard Solo, and now he had seen the youthful agent. Solo abandoned his cover and sprinted for his own car.

The small car roared away down the dirt road. In his own car Solo raced after the small car. The cultist drove like a madman, the small car careening down the dangerous dirt road. Solo clung grimly to the wheel of his own car as he followed as closely as he could.

The small car was quicker on the narrow turns, but Solo's car was heavier and held the road better. What he lost in speed on the curves, he gained back by holding the road better in and out of the turns.

But the small car pulled slowly away. And then the dirt road reached the highway—not the highway that went past the factory, but the coast highway. The mountains came down close to the sea, and beyond the road the cliffs dropped to the ocean.

The small car screeched into a turn and vanished down the highway and around a curve. Solo, forced to slow down, made the turn and gunned his heavier car after the vanished small car of his quarry. He rounded two sharp curves without sighting the car of the limping man.

Ahead there was a sickening screech of rubber, a loud, rending crash, and silence.

Solo came around the last curve into a long straightaway—and saw, just where the curve entered the straightaway, the broken guardrail above the sea. He jammed on his brakes. The highway ahead was completely empty. Solo jumped out of his stopped car and ran to the broken guardrail. The jagged pieces of wood and metal were still quivering.

He looked down over the edge of the sea cliff. Spreading ripples and white foam showed where something had struck. In the center of the circle of white, a black object bobbed on the surface, and, even as he watched, slowly sank.

It was the small black car.

Solo stared down, He saw no sign of life, no one swimming or struggling in the water. Then he looked carefully around him where he stood just off the highway.

Perhaps the limping man had gone over with his car, and perhaps he hadn't. Solo could not be sure either way. And it did not really matter. Either way, he was not going to catch the limping man this night.

Either the cultist was dead with his car, or he was snugly hidden somewhere in the bushes of the mountains across the highway. And if he were alive he was well aware of Solo on his trail. No, Solo would not catch up with his quarry now.

The chief agent of U.N.C.L.E. returned to his car, and turned back. He drove more slowly, but without wasting any time. On the dirt road he wondered if Illya had found anything at the armored truck.

He heard the wild firing as he neared the spot where the small

car had been parked. The heavy firing of what his trained ears told him was an U.N.C.L.E. Special firing on automatic.

Silently swearing at himself for splitting up forces, Solo leaped from his car, readied his own Special, and ran through the woods and across the open country toward where he had last seen the armored truck.

Again he swore at himself. Illya had fallen into a trap. Grimly he ran on, hoping that he was not too late. But while he was still a hundred yards away, the firing stopped. Solo paused, listened.

There was now no sound at all in the dark night.

THREE

SOLO CREPT quickly but silently through the bushes. Moving with the catlike speed of a trained athlete, he reached the edge of the road and looked out. What he saw made him stare in bewilderment.

The road, the guards, and the armored car were exactly the same as they had been when he last saw them.

Nothing had changed.

Illya was not in sight. There were no new bodies. There were no enemies, no one of any kind. Only a distant police siren, wailing faintly and moving closer.

Solo moved out from the bushes, standing openly now, and looked for any signs of the gun battle he had heard as he ran up. The only sign was a smell of burned powder in the night air.

He bent to check the unconscious guards. They were all alive, unharmed, and unmarked. The only injuries visible in the night were the torn and shattered bushes and trees.

And still he had not found Illya. He knew he had not been mistaken about the sound of the heavy firing he had heard—it had been an U.N.C.L.E. Special. Then Illya had to be here, unless they, some enemy, had taken their dead and wounded, and Illya, with them!

Solo was feeling far from happy with this thought; then he looked inside the armored truck. Illya lay face down on the bags of money, his U.N.C.L.E. Special still gripped in his hand.

With a sinking in his stomach, Solo leaped into the truck and bent over his friend. The small Russian did not move. Solo felt his friend's body. Illya was very much alive. Solo could see no signs of a wound or an injury of any kind. Like the guards outside, Illya appeared to be sleeping peacefully.

But Solo checked the Special in the blond Russian's hand. The clip was empty, the barrel still hot to the touch. Solo squatted on his heels in the silent truck and rubbed his jaw. What the devil had Illya been firing at?

In the silence of the dark night Solo felt the hair rise on the back

of his neck. There was something very strange, even weird, here on a deserted California back highway. Something connected to a Cult of strange, crippled, shaggy-haired men who worshiped some distant future.

Closer, but still far away, the approaching siren wailed like some disembodied banshee in the night. Solo opened his small attache case and took out a hypodermic needle.

His eyes studied the silent form of his friend. Then he selected a tiny ampoule from the case, snapped it into the case of the syringe, worked the plunger once, and injected the solution into the arm of the unconscious Illya.

Illya groaned, moved. Solo replaced the hypodermic in his case and waited. Illya groaned again, and suddenly came awake. The blond agent leaped up, crouched, his Special aimed and ready. He saw Solo.

"Quick, Napoleon! They're all around us! Cover the left!" Illya cried.

Solo watched the excited Slavic face of his partner.

"It's THRUSH! We should have known! They—." Illya said quickly, and then stopped suddenly.

Illya blinked his eyes and looked out through the rear door of the truck at the deserted highway in the dark night. Then he turned to Solo.

"Did I kill them all?" Illya said.

"All who?" Solo said slowly. "There's nothing out there except the guards, Illya."

"Don't be stupid! I saw at least six go down. I—What happened to me? I wasn't hit? I—"

"You just passed out. Your clip was empty, but there are no bodies out there, not even any blood. As far as I can tell, Illya, there never were any enemies out there."

"But I saw them, Napoleon! At least ten THRUSH agents. I saw their guns, their black uniforms, I even think I recognized two of them! I tell you I saw THRUSH men attacking me!"

Solo nodded. "I'm sure you did, but they just weren't there, Illya. You were firing at nothing!"

Illya's bright eyes looked at Solo from beneath his lowered brows, from under the haystack of blond hair. Then the agent nodded slowly.

"Like the guards," Illya said.

"Like the guards," Solo said.

"Some kind of hallucination. Something still inside the truck," Illya said.

Solo nodded grimly. "I'd say that was it. Something our shaggy, limping friend tossed in through the air vent."

"It was still inside the truck, and when I came in it got to me, too," Illya said. "I thought I saw THRUSH attacking. At least we know why the guards came out firing at nothing. They had some kind of hallucination. Probably that they were being held up."

"That has to be it," Solo agreed.

"The question is, why, and how, and just what kind of hallucination?"

Illya said, "But we know one more thing—I saw THRUSH agents. Why THRUSH? Why particularly did my mind tell me that it was THRUSH who was attacking?"

"Maybe we can get that answer back at the Cult headquarters," Solo said.

Illya nodded, looked alertly at Solo. "The limping man, what happened?"

Solo told the small Russian. "So he's probably dead, and that leaves us on a limb. We better get back and see what other leads we can pick up at the Cult."

Illya was about to answer when he stopped, listened. There were low groans outside the truck. Illya motioned, and the two agents leaped down to the highway. The armored truck guards were stirring now. The sirens of the approaching police cars were much closer.

"I think," Illya said, "I would much rather not have to explain this to the police."

"A solid piece of thinking," Solo agreed with a grin.

"I suggest we see what we can salvage at the Cult," Illya went on. "Mr. Waverly will not be pleased if we lose our contact."

"You know, I had the same thought," Solo said. "Shall we depart, fast?"

"I think we shall," Illya said.

The sirens were less than a half a mile away as the two agents turned and moved off into the night toward their car parked on the dirt road over the wooded hill.

The guards were beginning to sit up, staring around them. From the factory, as the sirens came close, men were now running down toward the road and the awakening guards.

Illya and Solo vanished soundlessly into the night.

The headquarters of the Things To Come Brotherhood was in a shabby old mansion on the northern outskirts of Los Angeles. As the two agents drove up, the mansion showed no light. Inside the building nothing at all appeared to be moving.

The two agents left their car parked in the shadows and approached the building on foot. There was no one on guard. Illya and Solo moved carefully among the trees and tall weeds of the neglected grounds.

Their informant had alerted them, before they left New York for this mission, that the old mansion and its unkempt grounds had been left to the Things To Come

Brotherhood by an insane, but very wealthy, admirer of the Cult.

Close to the tall, dark old frame building the two agents heard no sounds at all. Among the palms and bird-of-paradise plants they looked significantly at each other. Solo grinned somewhat weakly.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking, my Russian buddy?" Solo said.

"I have a certain suspicion that I am," Illya said drily. "I am afraid we have let them slip quietly through our fingers."

"Mr. Waverly will not be pleased," Solo said.

"That, Napoleon, is the understatement of the year," Illya said. "But I think we had better make sure."

To make sure did not take long. After a careful circling of the house, and finding neither light nor sound, Illya tried the front door and found it open. The mansion, so recently the scene of a meeting of some fifty very odd and shaggy people, was now as bare and silent as some forgotten Egyptian tomb.

"You take the left side. I'll take the right," Solo said.

Ten minutes later the two agents met glumly in the front entrance hall again. The mansion was as bare as a looted mummy's tomb.

"They even moved out the red velvet they had draping the speakers lectern," Illya reported. "No chairs, no lectern, no velvet bunting."

"Not even a burned cigarette butt," Solo said. "Our limping friend obviously survived the wreck. He hoodwinked me neatly, in that case."

"And to reach here so much before us he must have been picked up by another car," Illya pointed out.

Solo nodded. "Well, they've taken to the hills. It could take a year to dig them all out."

"Perhaps they left some files?" Illya said.

"All Russians are dreamers," Solo said.

"Of course, but shall we look?" Illya said.

They looked. There was, as Solo had suspected, nothing. For a harmless cult of crippled and shaggy-haired lunatics, the Things To Come Brotherhood had moved with remarkable speed and efficiency. The mansion had been swiftly and completely stripped.

The best the two U.N.C.L.E. agents could come up with was a single, empty match cover. The match cover had neither name nor address, just a drawing of a sardonic, devilish face with thick, white hair.

It was Illya who sighed. "We had better report, Napoleon."

"Do we have to?" Solo said.

For answer, Illya brought out what appeared to be a small cigarette case. Opened, the case proved to be a tiny radio sender-receiver, with a miniature tape recorder neat-

ly hidden behind a flat plate that held a row of cigarettes. Illya pressed his send button.

"Code eleven, New York direct, Agent two," Illya said mechanically.

Instantly the quiet, dry voice of Alexander Waverly, Section-I member (Policy and Operations) answered. The chief of the entire Western Hemisphere U.N.C.L.E. operation wasted no time with amenities.

"Yes, Mr.—uh—Illya Kuryakin? You have a report?"

Illya reported. At the far end of the radio communication, in his small but bright New York office, Waverly listened in silence. When Illya had finished, the two agents stood in the mansion and waited for the explosion."

"I see. Very enlightening," Waverly's voice said mildly. "Well, you hardly starred this time, but some of it is interesting. Is Mr. Solo there?"

"Here, sir," Solo said.

"Good. Well, I should say your usefulness out there is now minimal," Waverly said. "Return at once."

"You don't want us to finish here?" Solo said, somewhat incredulous. It was not like his dour chief to let them off a hook so easily.

"No," Waverly said. "We have a much better lead here. I think we've found the leader of our Cult."

Illya and Solo looked at each other as they clicked-off. When Mr. Waverly missed an opportunity to point out their many shortcomings, something important had to be happening. They ran to their car, and drove off toward the Los Angeles airport.

They were so busy wondering what the better lead was, that for once their habitual alertness was relaxed. They failed to see the bent, shuffling, shaggy-headed figure that limped out of the bushes near the old mansion.

They never saw the weird figure bend over a tiny pencil-like object and begin to talk rapidly.

FOUR

THE SECRET complex of U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters in New York is hidden behind a facade of old brownstones and a single large modern building on a quiet street not far from the river and the United Nations Buildings. There is no way of knowing that the quiet street hides a modern marvel of automated international police work.

There is no way of knowing that the billboard atop the modern white stone building houses an antenna in constant communication with all parts of the world.

There is no way of knowing that boats move beneath the street from U.N.C.L.E. to the river.

There is no way of knowing that the innocent shop in the center

of the block, *Del Floria's Cleaning & Tailoring,* is one of the four known entrances into the fortress-like complex of quick men, quick machines, and silent observation.

But what man can hide, man can find.

Someone knew.

As the taxi pulled up in front of Del Floria's Tailoring Shop, and the two men got out, it happened.

Two men, dressed the same as all the other young men walking along the midtown street, paid the taxi driver, then sauntered casually down the street, carrying their attache cases like everyone else.

But someone knew who they were and why they were going into Del Floria's Tailoring Shop. Someone who did not want them to enter Del Floria's—not alive.

The shots came close together. Three shots.

The first shot knocked Illya Kuryakin to the sidewalk.

The second shot went through the attache case of Napoleon Solo —because Solo, with the remarkable reflexes of his youth and his training, had moved the fraction of an inch when the first bullet struck his partner.

The third shot hit the sidewalk at the precise spot where Solo had hit the dirt, but Solo was no longer at that spot, having hit and rolled instantly.

There were no more shots.

Because there was nothing now to shoot at. Both Solo and the far-from-dead Illya were down behind the cover of brownstone steps, their Specials out, their eyes searching the buildings and the windows across the street. On the street itself cautious, if sophisticated, citizens of New York had abandoned both the street and the two agents. There was no screaming, just very fast hiding.

The street was empty for a long minute before other people who had not been close enough to see or hear the shots began to walk toward where the two agents crouched, their eyes looking for their attacker.

"You see anything?" Solo said.

"No," Illya said.

Neither man had looked at each other. Their eyes were too busy looking carefully at every building in front of them.

"How is it?" Solo said.

"Flesh wound, left shoulder," Illya said. "Whoever it is, he is not a good shot. Do you see anything?"

"No," Solo said, still looking only at the windows and the buildings. "Can you get an idea from the wound?"

There was a silence. Then Illya spoke. "Yes, I think I can. And I think I've got him. Look at the tall building a block to the north. Just to the left of the water tank."

Illya was looking through his binoculars. Solo focused his glasses. The building was over five-hundred yards away. At the base of the water tower something glinted,

moved. It was too far to be sure even through the glasses, but Illya voiced both their observations.

"One man. Can't quite make him out, but he looks like he needs a haircut."

"I agree," Solo said. "I—"

The voice came from behind them. A dry, clipped voice that spoke in slow, matter-of-fact tones.

"Mr.—uh—Solo, may I ask what you plan as your next move?"

The two agents, crouched low behind the shelter of the brownstone steps, turned and looked up at the aristocratic bloodhound face of Alexander Waverly. The chief of U.N.C.L.E. New York, was sucking on an unlighted pipe, his bushy brows frowning with a mildly critical puzzlement.

"Well—" Solo began.

"The sharpshooter is much too far away for convenient attack," Waverly said in his unruffled voice. "I doubt if he will wait for us to reach him. And it is doubtful that he will attack again, now that he knows he is discovered. Therefore, I suggest we enter the building and get on with our business."

Solo smiled weakly. "Yes, sir."

Illya pursued the matter one more step. "Wouldn't it be a good idea, sir, to see, if perhaps we can catch him? He seems to be still there, and—"

"Our security people are probably almost there by now, Mr. Kuryakin," Waverly said. "Is there anything else?"

"No, sir," Illya said.

"Then possibly we can get on with the more important aspects of the matter. My office, I think. There are two gentlemen who have been waiting for an hour to talk to you."

The Section-I leader of U.N.C.L.E. led his two agents through Del Floria's into the maze of steel corridors, all perpetually monitored and observed by Section 4 (Communications and Security). They went down the windowless corridors, past the rows of doors without knobs or keyholes, to the last door at the end of the main corridor on the fourth floor.

This was the office of Alexander Waverly. Inside, two men stood up as the chief led Solo and Illya in. They had been waiting. Also already waiting was the report from Security—the sniper had vanished unseen.

"Sniper?" one of the strangers said.

"Uh, yes," Waverly said. "I rather expect he has something to do with the affair in hand. Certainly not our old friend THRUSH. Much too amateurish."

"I don't think it was THRUSH," Solo agreed.

"Good," Waverly said drily. "Now may I have that match book you reported about?"

Solo blinked. "The, er, match book?"

"Yes, Mr. Solo. You did very little good out there, I agree, but

that match book seems promising. Unless I am mistaken, the picture you described on it is a likeness of the man we have reason to want—Morlock The Great."

FIVE

IN WAVERLY'S office there was a long silence. Then, at the press of a button on his desk, Waverly flashed a picture on the screen on his wall. It was a full-face and shoulders photograph of a pale, sinister looking man with jet black eye-brows either cut or painted in a sardonic "V."

Although the picture on the match book was a drawing, and the picture on the screen was a photograph, the long nose, satanic eyebrows and general countenance, and thick shock of white hair where unmistakably the same.

"Who is he?" Solo asked.

"Morlock The Great," one of the strangers said. "The world-famous magician. I've seen his act once; it's pretty good and downright creepy. He's a first-rate magician. But we've thought for a long time that he's considerably more than that."

Waverly cleared his throat, his fingers searching in the pockets of his waistcoat for a match to light his pipe. As he searched, he talked.

"Perhaps I had better introduce you gentlemen. Uh—Mr. Solo and Mr. Kuryakin, these two gentlemen are from Interpol. Mr. Fellini is from the Italian branch, and Mr. Dawes from the London office. As you both know, it was Interpol who first asked us to look into the problem."

Dawes, the taller of the two strangers in Waverly's office, nodded. "As far as we can find, chaps, there is no crime. Without a crime we have no jurisdiction. So—"

The shorter Interpol man, Fellini, broke in. "No crime, no, not yet! But there is something very bad, very evil!"

"Quite," Dawes agreed with his more volatile companion. "Something is jolly well up, but nothing we can come out and put a finger on. So we came to you chaps."

Illya leaned forward across the circular conference table. "Perhaps you could summarize for us. All we really know is that there is something peculiar about this cult, the Things To Come Brotherhood."

Dawes looked at Waverly. "You haven't told—"

Waverly found his matches, lighted his pipe, puffed thoughtfully. "I find it useful sometimes not to tell our people all the details of a case until they have learned a certain amount by themselves. However, with what Mr. Solo and Mr. Kuryakin found in California, I think we can now proceed."

U.N.C.L.E.'s New York chief turned his placid eyes toward his two agents. "Briefly, gentlemen, there has been a series of rather odd happenings. I think you will

recognize the picture. About six months ago an Italian coastal patrol ship opened fire one night. No reason was ever found for the action; there was absolutely nothing to fire at!

"Guards at two American installations, one in Turkey and one in Venezuela, fought for an hour each to repel an attack, and later it was found that there had been no attack! No one to fire at, and yet they had been sure they were being attacked.

"Then, only last week, soldiers at an English airbase shot down two civilians under the impression that their base was under heavy attack from Soviet forces. There were, again, no Soviet forces, no enemy action of any kind!"

Illya and Solo looked at each other. It was Solo who turned to Waverly.

"Almost exactly what we saw happen out in California," Solo said.

Waverly puffed on his pipe. "Precisely. Also, in each case the soldiers and sailors involved blacked out for a period of an hour afterwards. In addition, there have been a series of robberies in which the guards claimed to have been attacked by hordes of bandits. In each of these cases, no evidence of enemy action was found, all the guards blacked out, much money was taken by the non-existent attackers!"

"Exactly as we saw," Illya said,

"except in our case no money was taken!"

Waverly nodded. "That, I believe, tells us how the robberies were accomplished—one man caused the strange hallucinations, and when the guards blacked out, he helped himself to the loot. However, in your case, you were there and scared the man off."

"And the hallucination got me," Illya said.

"It would seem so. But you have confirmed the suspicions of Interpol—the Things To Come Brotherhood is involved in all of this," Waverly said.

Solo narrowed his keen eyes. "Confirmed the suspicions? Then Interpol had reason to think the Cult was involved before we went to California?"

Dawes answered. "Yes, we did,

but very stickily. We had an anonymous message, through secret but reliable channels. It came two weeks ago. All it said was that the Things To Come Brotherhood *knew about shadows that attacked.* Naturally, we put two and two together.

"Of course, the message was anonymous and as such rather unreliable, to say the least. But we did feel it important enough to act on. Since there is still no provable actual crime, we decided to drop it in the laps of you chaps."

Waverly took up the story. "I decided to send you two out to the only known chapter of the Cult in this country. The results seem to have warranted the effort, I should say. We now know that the Cult *is* involved in all this. What we don't know is why or how."

Illya nodded. "And Morlock The Great?"

"We have definite proof that he is connected to the Things To Come Brotherhood. He may actually be its leader," Fellini said. "The Cult is growing; we have proof. It is no longer as innocent a collection of fanatics as we had thought."

"They're all crippled in some way, you know," Dawes said. "They always seemed a harmless collection of poor unfortunate people. That ridiculous long, shaggy hair they wear. But now we're not at all sure. Especially if Morlock is running the show, as we suspect."

"Where is Morlock The Great?" Solo asked.

"In London, I'm sorry to say," Dawes said. "Naturally, we're watching him, but we haven't a shred of evidence to go on."

Waverly frowned at his pipe that had gone out. "Perhaps we will have. Our man in London is expected to report quite soon. With some luck, we can hope for more than we found in California."

"Who is there?" Solo asked.

"Mr.—uh—Morgan, I believe. A good man, despite his limp. He should give us something to go on."

There was a silence as Waverly and his two best agents all looked toward the overseas communication receiver.

* * *

DEEP BENEATH the city of London, in a dank and dim cellar room, the small horde moaned and chanted around the blaze of the great open fire.

The room was low and vast, its corners hidden in shadows not reached by the macabre flicker of the flames from the giant fireplace. In front of the fireplace, where the flames licked at logs, there was a large, flat stone like some ancient savage altar.

The small horde of people chanted and shuffled in a kind of weird dance, a grotesque shuffle, awkward and strange. At first glance an observer would not have been

sure why the shuffling dance seemed so peculiar. Then he would have seen—all the people in the vast room were crippled in some way.

Crippled, and with thick, shaggy hair that hung down almost to their shoulders.

They chanted in some strange language, moaned, and shuffled.

But their eyes were all focused on the great, flat stone.

They were waiting.

The fire burned high, the flames licking up, the flickering light creating giant shadows against the encrusted stone walls.

And he appeared.

A puff of thick white smoke and a man stood on the flat stone. A figure on the ancient altar-like stone. Perhaps a man, perhaps not. A monster, certainly.

One thick puff of smoke and the figure stood above all the chanting people. There was a great, low moan of joy.

The figure raised its hands.

Silence.

The figure stood there—a long, satanic face with thick, V-shaped eyebrows, a shock of thick white hair. A sardonic face of normal size—on the body of a child. The figure, the man, was less than five feet tall, and very thin, but his head, shaped like the head of the Devil himself, was full sized and his eyes glowed with power.

In the silence the shaggy-haired people waited.

The satanic-faced man turned to face the fire. He flicked his wrist, passed his hand before the fire. Thin smoke billowed out from the flames. In the room no one moved or spoke as the fumes spread through the room.

They came out of the fire, out of the flames themselves.

A winged monster with the head of an eagle, the body of a lion.

A squat, ape-like figure with the feet of a hawk.

A slavering creature with the yawning mouth of a shark.

A coiled snake, a giant snake, with plumes on its head.

They came from the fire and seemed to hover above the vast stone room.

There was a great moan of pain and yet of joy, and all the people except the satanic man on the stone altar fell on their faces.

All but the sardonic leader—and one man far off in the shadows of a corner.

This one man, a limping hunchback, let his eyes take in the whole scene; then, silently, he limped away and out through a stone archway. He limped on down a dark corridor until he reached a door. He went through the door and along another corridor.

In this second corridor he changed. He straightened up, his limp became less pronounced, and he moved at a quick trot. He reached another door, opened it, and went up a curving flight of

stone steps. At the top two shaggy-haired men watched him as he approached.

The man who had come up from below drew a small pistol and aimed it at each of the shaggy-haired men in turn. The pistol sounded twice—short, spitting sounds. Both his targets fell without a sound, not dead but instantly asleep.

The man jumped over them and entered an elevator. The elevator moved upward. When it stopped the man stepped out with his pistol ready. He shot down three more shaggy-haired guards. He ran, now, to one more door, climbed more stairs, and, at the top, pressed a button.

A slab of rock above him moved open. He climbed up and out into the ruins of a building. He ran through the ruins and came out onto the street of a city. He turned left and ducked into a doorway. Then he took a tiny, flat metal case from its hiding place inside the doorway.

He opened the case and pressed a button.

"Overseas direct, Waverly New York. Come in, New York!"

The man hunched over the flat metal case. He did not see the limping figures converging on the doorway where he waited. He did not see the tiny man with the white hair and satanic face who stood watching from just inside the ruined building.

"Go ahead, Agent Morgan," a voice said from the flat tin box.

"Code One, Confidential for Waverly," the man snapped.

There was another silence.

The limping figures reached the doorway.

The man looked up then and saw them.

* * *

ALEXANDER WAVERLY spoke into his microphone as Illya, Solo and the two Interpol men watched.

"Go ahead, Morgan. Morgan?"

A silence, and then, from the distant voice, suddenly filled with fear and panic, "End of the world! End of the world! Red at low noon! Red at—"

And screams, screams, screams—and silence.

In the New York office the five men looked at each other.

From the overseas radio—only silence, the screams gone.

ACT II

COME KILL WITH ME

THE LONDON MORGUE was damp and gloomy. No light came down into its dim recesses from the great city outside. The attendant drew out the body. The CID man, Taylor, turned away at the sight, coughing, walking a few feet from the corpse of Alec Morgan.

"Good God!" Napoleon Solo

said, his face ashen for once as he looked at the remains of his fellow U.N.C.L.E. agent.

Beyond a small, quick swallow of his throat, Illya betrayed no sign of what the grisly sight meant to him. The small Russian had lived all his life with violent death, with men less human than monsters. He had learned to show no feeling while he dedicated his life to the destruction of such men.

With a sharp motion, Illya stepped to the body of Alec Morgan. The sharp motion was to tell Solo to come with him. Together the two men looked down at the corpse. Every bone had been broken, hacked, torn as if by wild beasts. Alec Morgan had been, literally, beaten to death and torn limb from limb.

But it was the face of the dead U.N.C.L.E. agent that made Illya and Solo stare in horror. The face was twisted into a mask of terror. The eyes bulged in ultimate horror. It was not pain, there was no sign of pain. Illya looked and was sure of that.

"It's not pain. He looks—" Illya began.

"As if he'd seen the most terrifying thing he could imagine," Solo finished.

Illya nodded. "As if he saw his worst fear. And, Napoleon, I would venture that he was not conscious when this was done to him."

Taylor, the CID man, came back. Pale and almost green, the Scotland Yard chief inspector nodded slowly to Illya.

"Funny, but that was what our people thought," Taylor said. "The medical people said most of this was done after he was at least unconscious, perhaps already dead."

"He was conscious when he saw whatever made his face look like that," Solo said.

Illya nodded, turned away. "Well, I don't see what else we can do here. We better look at what he had with him when you found him."

"In my office," Taylor said.

But, an hour later, they had learned nothing. The miniature tape recorder had been smashed. There were no papers and no clues as to what had happened to Morgan, or where he had been. In Taylor's office, Illya stared at nothing while Solo listened to the chief inspector talk about Morlock The Great.

"He's a weird creature," Taylor said. "Little more than a midget. But those eyes! I've seen him do things myself that I swear aren't tricks, but we've never proven a thing. He's flirted with half a dozen international organizations, all suspected of various types of criminal activity. But this Things To Come Brotherhood seems to be his main activity."

"Just what do you know about them?" Illya said, his eyes hard beneath his lowered brow.

"A harmless cult of fanatics, we

thought," Taylor said. "A bit crazier than some others, but without any potential danger to anyone. Or so we thought. They were small enough, just a small group of poor, half-demented, physically handicapped people. Then, about a year ago, they seemed to begin growing.

"They started chapters all over the world. The main chapter is still here in England, however. They are all unknown little people, all crippled in some way. They go around wearing their hair in great, shaggy mops, almost in their eyes. Some of them seem to bleach it or dye it white! We started to check them not long ago, and while we haven't found a single one with a criminal record, at least a third seem to have been in mental institutions of some kind at one time."

"A third?" Solo said. "Insane?"

Taylor shook his head. "No, not insane. At least not that we can prove. Merely disturbed, neurotics. There's no law against being mentally sick. If there were, ninety percent of the fanatics and cultists would be behind bars. It's not unusual for cult members to have a history of mental trouble. They are almost always poor misfits who join the cult in search for some hope."

"And just what is the hope of The Things To Come Brotherhood?" Illya asked.

Taylor laughed. "To survive. Yes, that's right. They appear to believe that when all the rest of us have blown ourselves to oblivion, they will survive and live happily ever after!"

"Just survive?" Solo said. "On what do they base this, if I'm not asking too much logic?"

"We don't really know," Taylor said. "Cults are like that. They usually have some sort of God-figure—idol, if you prefer—who they think will treat them specially. It seems that our *morlocks* simply believe that they are ordained to survive. Sort of a prophecy, I think."

Illya sat alert, his sharp eyes narrowed beneath the shock of blond hair. *"Morlocks?"*

"That is what they call themselves," Taylor said. "That was how we first got onto the fact that Morlock The Great had something to do with them. Now we think he may be the leader."

"But you can't prove it?" Solo said.

Taylor sighed. "My dear chap, we can't *prove* anything. These shaggy little people just go around saying they will inherit The Things To Come. That's how they get their name. They hold open meetings, talk and talk about how they must prepare for their time, and keep rather quietly to themselves."

"On the surface," Solo said drily. "The one we ran into in California wasn't keeping quietly to himself."

"And the message said the Cult has something to do with all these peculiar attacks that aren't attacks," Illya said.

"And Alec Morgan is dead," Solo said. "He was working on the Cult."

Illya rubbed his chin. "End of the world, and Red at low noon," he mused. "It has to mean something. Morgan was trying to tell us something. A message of some kind, Napoleon."

There was a silence in the office of Chief Inspector Taylor. Both Solo and Illya were hearing those words again screamed across the miles of ocean from London to the New York office of Waverly. Chief Inspector Taylor seemed to have something else on his mind. The CID man hesitated, and then spoke carefully.

"It's just a thought, mind you," Taylor said, "but if those words were intended as a message, it's not likely that Morgan was referring to the actual end of the world?"

"Maybe trying to tell us how important it all was?" Solo said.

Illya disagreed. "I don't think he would be wasting his last words on a warning, Napoleon. I think the inspector may be right. Morgan wasn't talking about the actual end of the world. No, it was a message of some kind. Something that would help us."

"Then," Taylor said, "perhaps my little hunch may help. If I was surrounded by enemies, the first thing I'd want to tell you is something that would lead you to the right place for the job."

"It sounds logical," Solo said.

"A place?" Illya said.

Taylor nodded slowly. *"The End Of The World* is a pub, a public house. A tavern to you. And it's in the area where Morgan was found."

"A pub!" Solo cried. "Why not?"

"And 'Red At Low Noon' sounds like a password!" Illya said.

Taylor nodded. "It has that sound to me."

The two agents looked at each other. Solo shrugged. He stood up and stretched in the silent office. Then he checked his U.N.C.L.E. Special.

"Well, it's worth a try. We don't have anything else to go on right now, and I hate sitting around," Solo said.

"At least we can have a beer," Illya said.

Taylor said. "Do you want some help?"

Solo shook his head. "Not just yet. If they are up to some big trouble, they probably know your men."

"This will most likely be nothing," Illya said. "I think what you

can do is check our Morlock The Great. Find out where he is. If this turns out to be nothing, he's our last lead."

"All right," Taylor agreed.

Solo stowed away his U.N.C.L.E. Special, and smiled. "Well, shall we go to *The End Of The World?*"

"It might be interesting," Illya grinned. "I always wanted to be an explorer."

TWO

THE AREA was a vast complex of shabby old buildings, warehouses, and the ruins of war still standing like scars on the city. In many places the ruins had been cleared, and small, new houses put up for the poorer citizen of London. But it was an old and shabby area, the home of men who lived on the edge of life—petty criminals, the poor, the ragged hangers-on of the city.

The End Of The World was a large pub, ablaze with light in the center of vast black buildings. There were ruins around the public house, and warehouses, and the dark buildings where both men and rats lived in uneasy peace. In such a world liquor is a way of life, and a stream of people went in and out of the pub.

Barely noticed by the patrons of *The End Of The World,* two men limped down the street. One was small and dark, his dark hair thick and shaggy. He limped on his left leg and wore shabby old clothes that had not been cleaned for months. There was a black patch over his left eye, and a thick, black mustache on his upper lip.

"I'll go inside," the disguised Illya said. "I'm somewhat better at acting and fake accents, if I do say so."

The second man nodded. The second man was, of course, Napoleon Solo, but no one would have known that. He was hidden under a thick beard and old, shabby clothes. He limped also, as if his right leg was twisted. He was also, to anyone who might be watching, quite drunk.

"Check," Solo said. "I'll lean on that lamppost over there, where I can watch the door and the street. Keep your radio-ring open. If there's any danger, I can warn you."

Illya set his new transmitter-receiver ring, checked the rest of his hidden equipment and his U.N.C.L.E. Special, and left Solo leaning, apparently drunk, against the lamppost. The disguised Russian limped across the dark London street and into the glare and noise of *The End Of The World.*

Through the smoke and noise Illya limped up to the bar and ordered a whisky. His eyes, under his lowered brow, searched the room and the faces at the tables and lined up at the bar.

At first he saw nothing unusual.

Then, as he ordered his second whisky, he saw two small, limping men with shaggy hair come into the bar from a back room.

The bartender saw the two men at the same time. He wiped his hands and walked to them. At the far end of the bar they all leaned their heads together and whispered. Illya watched them covertly. The barman, then, was involved somehow with the Cult. Probably the two men were members, *morlocks;* they looked like it.

Illya bent over his drink, his left hand just under his lips. He spoke softly, barely moving his lips. "Sonny, this is Bubba. I have two potential bandits. The barman seems to be involved."

Illya sipped his drink, leaned his head down, looked around quickly. He was unobserved. A faint whisper came from his ring. Illya mumbled to himself, half-aloud, to cover the faint voice of Solo from his ring. "All clear here. Nothing unusual. Will stand by. Sonny over and out."

Illya clicked off and resumed his drinking and his scrutiny of the two shaggy men and the barman. As he looked at them again, he saw that they were now looking at him. The two shaggy men were walking toward him. The barman was also walking toward him, but behind the bar.

The bartender reached Illya first, and Illya suddenly leaned across the bar toward him.

"What do you think of 'Red at low noon?' Funny isn't it?" Illya said to the barman.

The barman's hand froze in mid-air in the process of picking up a glass. The two shaggy men had reached Illya now. They stood on each side of him. The barman nodded toward Illya.

"He thinks 'Red at low noon' is funny," the barman said.

"Does he?" one of the shaggy men said.

"What is 'Red at low noon?' " the second shaggy man said.

"What are words?" Illya said.

"You think 'Red at low noon' is just words?"

"Words that pass," Illya said.

There was a silence as the three of them looked at him. Then one of the shaggy ones motioned the barman away. The barman went. The shaggy man watched Illya.

"From what section?"

"Santa Carla, California," Illya said.

"So?" the second man said. Suddenly he thrust out his hand. Illya did not flinch, did not flicker an eyelid beneath his disguise. The man smiled. "Welcome, *morlock.* We need more word on Santa Carla. Come."

The two men turned without another word and limped through the smoke and noise toward the door. Illya finished his drink casually, and followed. So far it looked like he had been right, "Red at low noon" was indeed a password. At

the door the two men motioned him to hurry. He stepped out into the dark night.

The two men walked ahead to the left, past where Solo was under the lamppost. But Solo was not under the lamppost.

Illya raised his ring radio to his lips. "Sonny, this is Bubba. I have made contact. Sonny? Come in, Sonny. This is Bubba. Come in, Sonny."

There was only silence. The dim circle of light beneath the feeble lamppost was empty. The ring radio was silent. Illya looked up to see where the two men were.

He saw them standing in the road directly ahead of him. They seemed to be waiting for him. They were not alone.

As if from out of the earth itself men came limping into the dim light of the street. Many men, all limping, all shaggy-haired.

Illya looked around quickly.

He fingered the U.N.C.L.E. Special in his shoulder holster.

Then he dropped his hand to his side. They were all around him now. Too many of them.

He bent to his radio ring. "Sonny, this is Bubba. Mayday! Mayday!"

There was no answer, and suddenly, there was a great puff of smoke directly in front of him.

A man appeared standing where the smoke blew away. A tiny man with a sardonic face that was all black eyebrows and sharp nose. A man almost a midget, but with a large head of satanic cast. The man laughed.

"Ah, Mr. Kuryakin, I think. We expected U.N.C.L.E. to send someone," the tiny man said.

Illya knew at once that this was Morlock the Great.

Morlock The Great laughed again. "Our man missed you in New York, but we have you now. Very foolish to use that password Morgan gave you."

"I found you with it," Illya said drily. His voice was cool, calm, but his mind raced. Where was Napoleon?

"True, and that you may well regret," Morlock said. "You will also regret coming alone. Strange. I was sure Mr. Solo would be with you."

Illya watched the tiny man. They did not have Solo? The words sounded true. The Cult did not have Napoleon? Then who did? Morlock The Great gave him no more chance to think.

The tiny magician seemed to wave his hand. A cloud rolled over Illya's mind. He felt himself stiffening, losing consciousness. Where was Napoleon?

THREE

NAPOLEON SOLO had waited under the lamppost, feigning drunkenness, and watched Illya enter *The End Of The World*. Alert, ready to give the warning if any-

one suspicious entered. No one did.

Some time passed. The night was cold and wet under the feeble street lamp, and Solo stamped his feet, sang to convince anyone who watched that he was indeed drunk. He received Illya's first message, and became even more alert. Illya had spotted two possible suspects.

Solo was so busy watching the door and the street that he did not see them come from a building behind him until they were on him. The cold muzzle of a pistol was pressed into his back. An only too familiar voice hissed in his ear.

"Really, Napoleon, that beard!"

Maxine Trent!

"And those awful clothes and thick beard," the THRUSH agent purred. "What have they done to you? Why, I hardly get a twinge of desire when I see you like this."

"Good evening, Maxine," Solo said. 'Should I say it is a pleasant surprise?"

His alert eyes took in the situation at a glance. Maxine stood behind him, but she held no gun. Another THRUSH agent held the gun in his back. There were two other THRUSH men, armed and watching him closely.

"It's always pleasant, Napoleon. This time especially. I don't have to kill you," Maxine said sweetly.

"I'm relieved," Solo said.

He turned and smiled at the beautiful THRUSH agent he knew so well. Her violet eyes were so deceptively alluring. Her long, soft

hair was black now—it could be red, or blonde, or any color she chose for any job. Solo ran her through his mind like a card through a computer: age twenty-five; all the right measurements; runner-up for Miss America one year; daughter of industrialist Clark Trent. One of the best, most skillful of THRUSH agents. A tall, lovely, deadly woman.

"To what do I owe my good fortune?" Solo said.

"I need you," Maxine said. "I want to know all you know about Morlock The Great and the Cult."

"So you're working with him?" Napoleon said. "That makes him a little more dangerous."

Maxine smiled. "Why, thank you, Napoleon. I take that as a compliment. THRUSH will be pleased. Now, tell me—"

The beautiful THRUSH agent stopped. Her violet eyes were looking across the street. Solo whirled. The door of *The End Of The*

World had opened. Two shaggy men stepped out.

"Well—" Solo began.

He got no farther. As he turned back to Maxine, the tall woman reached out and touched his neck with her hand. She was smiling. Solo felt the tiny pin prick, and knew no more.

* * *

ILLYA opened his eyes. There was no light. He moved and found that he was lying on a damp stone floor. He flexed his arms and his hands. He was not tied up. He felt his face—his disguise was gone.

He sat up and looked around. His eyes, as they grew accustomed to the dark, saw the confines of his prison. Four stone walls, no windows, perhaps ten square feet of floor space. A table and a chair. Nothing else.

And not a sound. He listened. The stone room was quieter than a tomb. No sound at all.

He looked at his watch. Strangely, they had left him all his clothes, his jewelry and hidden weapons. His U.N.C.L.E. Special, and his knife, were gone. Also his eye patch and false mustache. His watch showed that no more than half an hour had passed since he had left *The End Of The World*. Then he had to be still somewhere in London.

But there was no sound at all. The entire life of the great city gave no hint of existing somewhere beyond the stone walls. He felt no drafts, no current of air. Nothing on the surface could be this silent. He was underground—in a stone room far under the earth.

Somewhere deep under the heart of London the *morlocks* must have headquarters, their real headquarters. The shaggy, limping creatures lurking in hidden passages under the earth and—. And Illya stopped. If there had been any light his eyes would have brightened.

He had it! *Morlocks!* The Things To Come Brotherhood! What had Taylor, the CID Inspector, said? They believe they will survive! Of course, H. G. Wells and his Time Machine! They had mixed *two* of H. G. Wells's stories. The *morlocks* appeared in *The Time Machine*. *Things To Come* was another book. And yet, both books were much the same—they presented what Wells thought the future would be like!

A world destroyed—and the *morlocks* survived! More than that, the *morlocks* ruled the future! A mutant race of shaggy-haired, half-crippled men who lived on, and controlled, their more fortunate-looking fellow humans. This Cult had merely taken the deformed and cast-out, the survivors of mental wards, and told them they would, indeed, survive and inherit the earth!

Ridiculous, half-insane; yet what

else was any Cult? Cults grew because some people, some groups, had to have a dream to believe, no matter how crazy it was. What better dream than to believe that you will inherit the earth, and are, therefore, really better than all the normal, healthy, handsome people?

But what were they up to now? Harmless, Taylor had said. Perhaps they may have been once, but now—

Illya jerked from his reverie. There had been a sound, a noise. Even as he watched, a section of the wall opened and a figure entered.

Two figures.

A shaft of light from outside fell on Illya, revealing him, but also revealing the two figures.

They were more grotesque than any he had seen before.

One was a heavy, ape-like figure with its face barely visible beneath the shaggy shock of white-dyed hair.

The second was a thin, hunchbacked figure that shuffled behind the first, its face also invisible under the shaggy hair. This second figure carried a long club. Both *morlocks* moved to stand over Illya. The agent tensed to attack. There were only two. But he never moved.

Even as he prepared, the hunchback raised his club and smashed it down on the head of his companion.

NAPOLEON SOLO heard the water and felt the motion of the barge under him. He was pinioned securely to the chair. The two THRUSH agents were preparing their instruments. Maxine grinned at Solo

"Come now, Napoleon dear. Don't make me resort to such old fashioned methods."

"Believe me, all I want is to know what you in U.N.C.L.E. have learned about Morlock The Great, the Cult, and how they make people fight when there is nothing to fight."

"I'll bet you would," Solo said.

"I have orders to let you go if you co-operate. You know how unprecedented that would be. Really, Napoleon, all we want this time is some information."

"That's all? You ask so little, Maxine," Solo said.

"Please, Napoleon, I have a few scores to settle, but I'm willing to forget if you would just—"

Maxine stopped. Solo, tied securely, could not see what she was looking at, but she was looking at something, or someone over his shoulder. She nodded quickly, and stepped past Solo out of his sight. The agent was not worried about Maxine; he was still watching the two THRUSH men preparing their tortures for him.

He saw that they had their backs to him. He listened. He could hear no one behind him. He began to work on his bonds. They were secure. And the thorough THRUSH

people had taken all the secret weapons they could find. But they had not taken everything.

At that moment Maxine Trent returned. The beautiful THRUSH agent smiled down at him.

"I have to go, Napoleon. I will leave you in the capable hands of Walter and Bruno there. Remember, they have instructions to let you go once you have talked fully."

With that, Maxine turned on her heel, spoke low and sharp to the two torturers, Walter and Bruno, and walked quickly from the cabin of the barge. Moments later, Solo heard a motor boat roar away.

Silence descended on the barge. He listened, but he could hear no other sound of life but the lapping of the water. He heard the water and the metallic sounds of Walter and Bruno preparing for his torture. Then all sound stopped but the water.

Walter and Bruno turned to look at him. Both of them smiled. Solo did not have to ask. He could see that Walter and Bruno were going to enjoy their work on him.

FOUR

ILLYA FOLLOWED the limping hunchback down dark corridors and through many narrow stone rooms. His keen eyes studied the walls and corridors. The corridors were no longer of damp stone, they were concrete—thick new concrete. He saw air vents high in the walls.

At last they reached a small room far from the stone prison he had been kept in. This room had no entrance and was piled to the ceiling with cans of food. Or, to be exact, the room had an entrance, a door, but that was not the way the hunchback led Illya into the room. They entered through a large hole left when the hunchback removed a loose stone in the corridor.

The hunchback replaced the stone and turned to smile at Illya.

"We will be safe here for a time. That door is locked on the outside. Only the inner council members have keys."

"That loose stone?" Illya said.

"Only I know about that. I had prepared it for myself in case I was discovered."

Illya looked at the crippled man. Now, smiling, and with the thick hair pulled back from his face, Illya could see that the hunchback was relatively young, not at all bad looking.

Under the hair was a gentle, intelligent face.

"You wrote that note to Interpol?" Illya said. "About the firing at shadows?"

The *morlock* nodded. "Yes, I wrote it. My name is Paul, Paul Dabori. I joined them when I felt I must have some friends, but now I know there is something wrong. They must be stopped. You are from Interpol?"

"No, from U.N.C.L.E.," Illya said.

"Ah, I have heard of U.N.C.L.E.," Dabori said. "That is better."

Far off, suddenly, there was a sound of gongs. Loud, frantic ringing of gongs. Illya stood alert in the dark of the hidden storeroom. Paul Dabori nodded. The hunchback seemed disturbed.

"They have discovered your escape. I killed the other guard, but they are not fools. They will guess that I have helped you. We will not be safe here much longer."

"Why must they be stopped?" Illya said.

"I will tell you, but first we must escape," Dabori said.

"How?"

"I have a way. This was an ancient cellar. It connects to the sewers. That is our only way out, the sewers down to the river."

"All right. Let's go now," Illya said.

Dabori shook his head. "No, I know how they will search. We must wait until they are almost here; then we can pass them and reach the sewers. You see, we must go through some of the new corridors to reach the old sewers."

In the dark Illya sat with the hunchback. The two men listened to the incessant clangor of the gongs, the distant sounds of voices and running feet. Illya stood up to inspect the room. He saw that the cans were filled with basic foods: meats, vegetables, butter, sugar. All in cans.

And there were large cans of plain water. Puzzled, Illya continued his search.

There was medicine, and surgical supplies, and some large cylindrical objects that Illya recognized as air filters. Then he touched the walls. The walls were not stone on the inside.

The walls were lead!

"Yes," Dabori said behind him. "The walls are lead-lined. The new concrete is twelve feet thick. There is food and water for a hundred men for six months. The new parts are all sealed into a unit; the air is filtered through many filters. There is even oxygen in case the vents must be closed for a time."

Illya touched the lead walls again. Then he slowly turned to look at Dabori.

The hunchback, even in the dim interior of the hidden storeroom, was grim.

"An atom bomb shelter," Illya said. "A secret, and very well built atom bomb shelter!"

"Yes," Dabori said. "It is part of the plan. There are many such shelters in the world now, all the plan of Morlock The Great. That is why I had to tell—"

Dabori stopped, held up his small hand. Illya froze. Just outside the room he heard voices and footsteps. Somone tried the door. Outside men stood around the door. Inside, Illya took hold of his

small, cuff-link gas bombs, and waited.

* * *

WALTER and Bruno bent to take off Solo's shoes. They both bent down, eager to get to work. Solo waited until their faces were both close to him near his feet. Then, with a powerful effort, he lifted his entire body, and the chair itself, a few inches off the floor in a jump, and came down on the heel of his left shoe.

The two THRUSH men, intent on the anticipation of torturing Solo, failed to react for a split second. It was enough. As Solo made his jump and came down, they reacted and hurled themselves backwards. They were too late.

A spurt of reddish gas burst from the capsule hidden in Solo's heel. The gas quickly expanded flush into their faces. They gasped once each.

Solo hurled himself over backward and as far as he could go. Even then he got a faint whiff of the gas before it dispersed in the air of the barge cabin.

The whiff made his head reel, made him fight for consciousness. Everything went black and green and red and he felt himself slipping away; then it was gone. He lay in a sharp draft of wind from under the door.

Quickly he crawled himself around on the floor, the chair still firmly tied to him. Walter and Bruno had taken the full dose straight into their faces before they had time to jump away. They both lay flat, eyes staring at nothing, barely breathing.

Solo had two hours.

In two hours they would revive —with headaches but otherwise as good as ever. Before then, Solo had to be free. Where he lay, his eyes searched the barge cabin. What he wanted was on the leg of that very table where Walter and Bruno had prepared their instruments of torture—a small blowtorch with a thin jet of blue flame.

Painfully, Solo gathered his muscles and heaved himself to his knees. He swayed to his feet with another lunge upward, staggered, crouched over with the chair against his back and legs, knees bent where they were tied to the chair. But he did not fall, the training and balance of the trained athlete coming to his aid now.

Earlier, while they were overpowering him, he had cursed as his hand, rasping against a corner of the table, had grated on a rough abrasive edge of the wood, which had in fact tore some skin from his hand. Solo stared down at the ragged fused bit of wood and metal. Solo grinned, the sweat running into his eyes. Then he lay down and went to work.

They had made one mistake in binding him. After looping the rope firmly around his legs, they had tied it off to the rear rung of the

chair—as far from his hands and feet as they could get. Now that was going to free him. He extended his legs until the chair, where he lay on his side, rubbed against the roughened table leg, just under where it joined the upper surface of the table itself.

It was hard, back-breaking work, scraping the rope against the table. He was lying at an awkwardly cramped angle, so that the labor of rubbing his legs against the abrasive spot put a terrific strain on his lumbar muscles. Every ten minutes he had to rest, panting. After what seemed like an eternity, he strained, almost without hope, and felt the torn rope part.

For a precious moment he fell back on the floor, hoarding and restoring his strength which had been so sorely spent. Then, not daring to rest longer, he went to work again.

Quickly now, his legs free, he stood up straight, the chair still tied only to his arms behind him. They had not been stupid enough to use only one rope. He looked at Walter and Bruno. The two THRUSH men had not moved. Grinning to himself again, Solo repeated the operation, but much more easily this time.

With his legs free, he was able to maneuver his body to where the ropes on his hands and arms crossed the upper part of the table leg.

Three minutes later he was free,

with nothing worse than two ugly scrapes on his hand.

He threw the chair away, and quickly felt the lining of his jacket. He found, and drew out, a tiny flat needlelike object. Then he found a flat capsule-like object inside the thick cuff of his trousers. The capsule-like, flat cylinder was wrapped in a tiny net of cotton. He fitted the capsule into the miniature syringe, bent over Walter, and inserted the needle into the THRUSH man's arm.

He squeezed the flat capsule.

Walter jerked, shuddered, his limbs moving in spasms. Then the THRUSH man's eyes began to flutter. Suddenly they came open. But Walter was not awake, not really.

Solo bent close to the ear of the THRUSH man. "Where did Maxine go? Agent Trent, where did she go and why? Answer!"

Walter's eyes blinked, his body jerked, his lips began to move. "Uh—No—I will not—" The THRUSH man shuddered convul-

sively. "I—she went to—Morlock. The country house; Salisbury—you must capture him and make him—tell—"

Solo let the man fall back and threw away his now useless miniature syringe of powerful truth-serum and stimulant. Moments later he was swimming in the icy water of the Thames. He reached the shore, a wide flat of mud at low tide, and climbed up the embankment. It took him five minutes to locate a telephone, and five more minutes to get the exact location of Morlock The Great's house near Salisbury.

"Can I help now, Solo?" Inspector Taylor asked from the far end of the line.

"Stay where you are," Solo said. "If Illya can't get to me, he'll probably contact you. Tell him where I've gone!"

Ten minutes after that a black car, delivered to the bank of the Thames by a silent man in a business suit, raced away toward the south and west toward Salisbury.

The silent man was an U.N.C.L.E. agent in London, Section I (Communications and Security). The man driving the car was Napoleon Solo—re-armed and anxious to find Maxine Trent and her men.

FIVE

FIVE MILES from the ancient cathedral town of Salisbury, the magnificent spire of the cathedral itself out of sight to the north, the black car slowed to a halt five hundred yards down a country lane from a big, gothic house. Behind the wheel, Solo looked at the silent house through his infra-red binoculars.

What he saw made him slide silently from his car and fade quickly into the thick hedgerow that bordered the country lane. They were there. Two black cars and at least seven THRUSH men, wearing their black uniforms and carrying ugly rifles with the heavy, round infra-red night scopes.

Cautiously Solo moved closer. They, the THRUSH men, were deployed around the old house. The house itself was dark and silent. Solo looked for Maxine Trent. He finally located her standing with two THRUSH chief guards near one of the two cars. They appeared to be planning their attack.

Solo edged closer, his U.N.C.L.E. Special ready, but cautious because there were too many of them. They seemed ready to move. One of the two chief guards of THRUSH stepped forward from the shelter of the car toward where his men waited. He took two steps—and stopped.

High on the third floor of the gothic house, on a small balcony, there was a sudden flash and a great red glow seemed to bathe the facade of the house in an eerie red light. The THRUSH attackers stared upward.

The night was as bright as day with the red glow.

On the small balcony there was a puff of blue smoke.

A man stood on the balcony.

Solo recognized the satanic face of Morlock The Great.

The midget-like figure with the oversized head stood high on the balcony and laughed down at the gaping Thrush men.

The THRUSH leader stared upward.

For a long minute nothing moved, nothing happened but the weird laughter of the midget bathed in the red glow. Then Maxine Trent shouted.

"There he is! Take him alive!"

As if galvanized by an electric shock, the THRUSH men leaped up and ran toward the house. They did not hesitate a second, the command of their superior far more powerful to them than any fear. They ran up the steps of the old house—and fell in a hail of withering fire.

The THRUSH men screamed. The red glow went out on the balcony above. In the dark the THRUSH men stumbled across the porch and into the house. Inside there was more fire and more screaming in pain.

Solo watched as a THRUSH man ran back out onto the steps of the old house.

"Empty! The place is empty!"

"Someone fired at us!" a THRUSH leader cried.

"No one! Automatic fire. Booby trap!"

Solo saw the flash of blue light to the left. The light flashed at a spot fifty yards from the house. A blue light bright on a small hillock. Another puff of smoke, white this time, and Morlock The Great stood on the hillock, laughing Maxine Trent cursed and shouted to her surviving men.

The THRUSH soldiers ran toward the small hillock.

Solo watched. He was impressed by what he knew had to be tricks. He had seen great magicians work before. But they were impressive tricks. Even though he knew that this was Morlock's house and would have been prepared, the trick of the smoke and lights was enough to almost frighten him.

On the hillock, Morlock laughed. His tiny, devilish figure mocked the running THRUSH men.

As the THRUSH soldiers reached the foot of the hill they vanished in a series of explosions. Solo nodded. Mines. Morlock had taunted the THRUSH men into a small, private minefield.

The THRUSH soldiers groaned, screamed.

Morlock The Great vanished from the hillock.

Once more the tiny magician appeared, this time on a tall stone two hundred yards from the house. A puff of red smoke and the midget magician stood there.

No one pursued him.

Only Maxine Trent, safe behind the car, was left to stand and stare at the distant figure. Morlock laughed once more, and was gone.

Solo stepped out of the bushes and stood behind Maxine Trent.

"You're having a hard night, Maxine," Solo said.

The woman agent whirled, her violet eyes flashing in the dark. She reached down, lifted her skirt to show her long, magnificent leg. Solo saw the holster strapped to the shapely thigh.

"Ah, ah, Maxine!" Solo said, his Special trained on her. "You're all alone now."

Maxine hesitated, smiled, straightened up and looked around her at the bodies of her men.

"So I am, Napoleon. But not really, darling. I have you," Maxine said.

Solo grinned. "Correction. I have you. Shall we go?"

Maxine shrugged. Solo motioned her into the silent house. He stepped warily, watching for more of Morlock The Great's little traps, and for the very possible return of the wily little magician himself.

But inside the house all was silent. There were no more traps, no sign of Morlock The Great. In fact, there was nothing inside the house at all. Solo stared around slowly at the vast emptiness. Even Maxine Trent blinked her violet eyes in a puzzled surprise.

Why would Morlock The Great come to an empty house? And why have an empty house so well booby-trapped with automatic weapons and mine fields?

* * *

THE GENTLE-FACED hunchback, Paul Dabori, sat against the wall of the lead-lined storeroom deep under the great city of London. The voice and footsteps outside had gone away without searching the storeroom, and Illya listened as Dabori told his story.

"I was lonely, I suppose, Mr. Kuryakin," Dabori said. "We are all lonely, we human beings, one way or the other. But for a man like me—"

"You seem like a very good man," Illya said quietly.

Dabori shrugged. "I was, I suppose, feeling sorry for myself. I joined them. They said that since we who were crippled, deformed, were shut out from the rest of the world, we had to make our own world. I was full of self-pity then. I listened. It was, they told me, a brotherhood and a literary society."

"And then you found that they were building the atomic bomb shelters?" Illya said.

Dabori nodded. "Here, and under Morlock The Great's house at Salisbury. I helped work on that shelter. They have built them all over the world."

"Why?" Illya said grimly. "Why are they building them? Just in

case? To be sure to survive? That is possible, but you don't think so, do you, Paul?"

"No. Morlock has a plan of some kind, a plan that will be put into effect soon. Somehow it involves all those robberies and the attacks where no one attacked."

"Soon?" Illya said.

"Very soon, I think."

Illya stood up in the hidden, lead-lined storeroom. "Then we must get out of here. Tell me, have you seen another prisoner?" And Illya described Solo.

Dabori shook his head. "No, no one like that. But perhaps Morlock took him to the Salisbury house. Morlock is there now himself."

"You know how to get there?" Illya asked the hunchback.

"Yes," Dabori said. "But we cannot go yet. They are still searching for you. We must wait."

"But not long," Illya said. "Soon we'll have to take some action, Paul."

Dabori nodded. "I know. I am ready."

In the dim light of the lead-lined room Illya Kuryakin and the gentle hunchback listened and waited.

* * *

SOLO and Maxine Trent completed their search of the house. In the front hall, with the bodies of two of her men, they stood and considered what they had found.

"Nothing," Maxine said, undisturbed by the bodies of her men. "Absolutely nothing."

"But wired for defense. Why?" Solo said. "It's your turn to tell me what I want to know, Maxine. For instance, there should be a cellar under this house, but there seems to be no entrance into a cellar."

"I noticed the same thing. You think the real part of this place is down below?"

"Why don't you tell me, Maxine?" Solo said.

"Oh for God's sake, Napoleon, don't you realize yet that we're not working with Morlock The Great! He just killed eight of my men!"

Solo grinned, his Special still warily trained on the beautiful THRUSH agent. "With THRUSH that could be a lover's quarrel."

"For the last time, you fool, THRUSH is just as anxious to stop Morlock The Great as U.N.C.L.E. is! Do you think *we* want some other organization getting in our way?"

"Not enough spoils to go around, eh?" Solo said.

Maxine shrugged. "If you like, yes. We in THRUSH have no love for competitors. We have enough trouble with do-good outfits like U.N.C.L.E. without having to worry about amateur competitors."

Solo smiled. "Just what are you suggesting?"

"That we pool forces! There, I said it! Think of it, Napoleon—for once we can work together. You want to stop the Cult, whatever it's

up to, and so do we. You saw how much Morlock loves us! I say we work together."

"Why should we? You want to know what we know. What do you have to offer?" Solo said.

"Illya Kuryakin and how to save him," Maxine said.

Solo watched the beautiful THRUSH agent. He did not trust her as far as he could have thrown all of England. But if she knew where Illya was! After all, it was obvious that she, and THRUSH, were not working with Morlock and his Cult this time.

"You know where Illya is?"

"I saw them take him, Napoleon, and I know how to get into their London headquarters," Maxine said.

Solo grinned. "Then welcome, partner."

Maxine laughed. "It has a nice sound. And may I have my gun back?"

"On one condition," Solo said.

"Condition, Napoleon dear?"

"That I can put it back into its holster."

"Napoleon, you do care!"

Smiling, Solo returned her small pistol to its holster on her long, beautiful leg. Maxine laughed as Solo kissed her lightly. He, too, laughed—he had taken the precaution of palming the bullets from the clip before he returned the pistol.

"Shall we go to London?" Solo said.

"Lead on, partner," Maxine said.

ACT III

THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST

MAXINE TRENT lifted her skirt to climb up out of the old sewer onto the ledge of dry stone. Solo followed her. Together they stood in the dark far below London. Rats scurried against the ancient stone walls, and ahead there was a door.

"That's it, Napoleon," Maxine said. "One of our men located it last week."

"Where does it lead?"

"Into the old tunnels and corridors. There are new corridors, but I think we can find a way through."

"Stay here," Solo said.

The agent inched along the stone ledge to the old door. It was rusted

and locked, but there was a trace of oil around the lock. The door had been used. Solo took out a small strip of what looked like foil and stuck it to the door next to the lock. The foil was self adhesive. Solo pulled a small metallic thread and jumped back.

The foil burst into an intense white heat. The door glowed around the lock, melted, and when the white hot glow died away in the dark sewer, a gaping hole had appeared in the metal around the lock. Solo stepped forward and pushed the door open. He motioned to Maxine.

Together, Solo and Maxine stepped through the door and into a short stone tunnel that led to a flight of stone steps going upward. Carefully, they moved up the stairs in the pitch dark. The steps did not go far, and came out in a low room that stank of slime and ancient decay.

They crossed the low room and went through an archway into another low stone room. The second room was low but vast, its corners hidden in the dark. Solo flicked on his ring flashlight. The ultra-powerful beam picked out all the corners of the vast room.

Rusted metal rings hung from the walls; rusted metal cages littered the floor. Spikes that had once been sharp protruded out from the walls. There was a cauldron and a brazier all turned to dust at Solo's touch. What had once been skeletons lay on the floor, nothing now but white dust.

"Things don't change much," Solo said. "It reminds me of a THRUSH headquarters."

"Ah, ah, Napoleon dear. Remember, we're partners; speak nicely about us," Maxine said.

"I'd rather speak nicely about how we're going to get out of here," Solo said, his powerful miniature light playing around the walls. "I don't see any way out, and no one's been in here for centuries. There must be another way in; that door had been oiled."

"Then we better find it," Maxine said.

They turned and retraced their steps to the smaller stone room. As they passed out of the vast room into the smaller one, Solo suddenly crouched and pulled Maxine down. His U.N.C.L.E. Special was out. Maxine held her pistol.

Something moved along the right wall of the smaller room. Solo and Maxine waited, watched. His light out, Solo crouched with his Special trained on the wall. A stone moved, a large stone.

The stone fell into the room.

Someone, a figure, came through the hole in the wall. A second figure followed. The two figures turned to replace the stone.

Solo switched on his miniature flashlight ring.

The two strangers dove for the floor.

Solo and Maxine shone the light

directly on the two and stepped forward with their weapons.

* * *

DEEP beneath the city of London, in a large, soundproof room lined with thick sheets of lead, the twelve men sat at the long table and watched their leader. They were all deformed, disfigured men, and their leader was Morlock The Great.

The tiny magician stood before a great map of the world. His thin, delicate hands swept an arc in the air that took in the whole world and the many red pins on the map. His eyes gleamed in his large head.

"They are all completed. We are ready. We will not wait now."

"And Kuryakin?" one of the men at the table said.

"He does not matter. He and Dabori cannot escape from here," Morlock said.

"Dabori perhaps has found a way. I never trusted him," another man said.

"It does not matter!" Morlock said. "If they escape it will be too late. We know they have not yet escaped. I am telling the Inner Council, you men, that the day is at hand! We move—tonight!"

The twelve men at the table looked at each other, and their eyes glowed like the eyes of their leader. Morlock The Great laughed a diabolical laugh that filled the large room where the Inner Council of the Brotherhood held their secret meetings.

"They all want to stop us, but they will not!" Morlock said. "After tomorrow the prophecy will be fulfilled—we will inherit the whole Earth!"

Excitement ran through the room like an electric current. The members of the Inner Council began to talk, to congratulate their chief. Suddenly, there was a low buzz and a light over the single door began to blink. Morlock pressed a button.

"Yes?" the tiny magician said.

"Report strangers entering the old vaults from the sewer!"

"How many?" Morlock snapped.

"Two, sir. The detector shows that they are armed."

"Very well. Deal with them!" Morlock snapped, and then said, "No, wait. I will come and deal with them myself."

The midget switched off his communicator. His satanic features twisted into a crazy grin as he surveyed the members of his Inner Council.

"As a precaution, we will find out who they are and what they know. But, whoever they are, they will not stop us now. Tonight, gentlemen! Tonight the *morlocks* take over the world, as predicted long ago!"

In the large, secret room far beneath the great city, there was a savage shout from all the leaders of the Cult.

AS HE stepped toward the two figures on the old stones, Napoleon Solo grinned. But he didn't feel as happy as he looked.

"Really, Illya, you look silly lying there," Solo said.

Illya raised his head. The small Russian stood up and dusted himself off.

"What took you so long, Napoleon?"

"I was delayed," Solo said, "but I brought a friend. Step forward, Maxine."

Maxine Trent came into the light of the tiny ring flashlight. The beautiful THRUSH agent smiled at Illya.

The blond U.N.C.L.E. agent raised an eyebrow.

"A friend, Napoleon?"

"In this case, apparently," Solo said, and explained the details of THRUSH's participation in the affair.

"It should be an interesting experience," Illya said as he eyed Maxine from under his lowered brows. "I, too, have a friend. Paul Dabori is the man who sent the warning to Interpol."

Illya recounted his experiences and the four of them squatted in the dark, the light out now, to plan their next move. Solo rubbed his chin.

"Atom bomb shelters," Solo said slowly.

"That explains why the house in Salisbury was so empty. A bomb shelter underneath it," Maxine said.

But Solo was not listening. He was rubbing his chin, thinking. Now he looked at Illya and the *morlock,* Paul Dabori. The hunchback waited eagerly to see what he could do.

"Atom bomb shelters," Solo said again, "and robberies for money to stock them, probably. And hallucinations that make men think they are being attacked."

Illya nodded. "Are you thinking the same thing, Napoleon?"

"When you had the hallucination," Solo said, "you thought THRUSH was attacking you."

"The enemy most on my mind," Illya said. "Yes. And those armored car guards thought they were being robbed—what was most on their mind."

"And the Cult believes that they will survive while the rest of the world goes under," Solo said.

There was a silence, and it was Maxine Trent who finally spoke. Maxine had listened, and now she spoke.

"And they have built atom bomb shelters. So it is clear that Morlock The Great intends to help his Cult survive. He doesn't intend to wait, he's going to make the atom bombs drop!"

Illya sighed. "It looks very much that way. I'm afraid that rather than wait for us to kill each other off, he's going to help us—by starting an atomic war!"

Dabori finished it. "And soon. I know it is soon. They are worried that they will be discovered."

This time the silence was deeper. Maxine Trent seemed lost in her own thoughts. Solo and Illya were seeing the horror of what they had just said. Somehow, Morlock The Great intended to set the powers of the world at war with each other—an atomic war in which the only survivors would be the Cult itself, deep in its shelters. Illya moved.

"You brought weapons for us?" Illya said.

"Of course," Solo said.

Solo handed the extra U.N.C.L.E. Special he had brought to Illya, and handed Dabori the small pistol he carried as a spare. Maxine drew her own pistol from the holster on her leg.

The four crawled back through the opening in the wall into the inner corridor. They followed Dabori as the hunchback led them back along the old stone corridors until they reached a lead door. Dabori opened this door with a key he had stolen, and the four stepped through into the new shelter-headquarters of the Cult.

TWO

AFTER A time, moving down the silent concrete concrete corridors with their faintly whirring air-vents and lead doors, they became aware of a strange silence. Dabori was the first to raise his head. The hunchback was puzzled.

"We should have met guards. There should be noise, some activity," Dabori whispered.

"How many men are down here?" Solo asked, his voice low.

"Normally fifty who are the regulars, and some fifty more who come and go. Morlock did not want too many of us to vanish from the surface at one time. Most of the Cult hold down regular jobs. Only a cadre of elite are permanently down below," Dabori explained.

They continued along the concrete corridors, so silent they could have been buried beneath the Sahara Desert. Illya was worried.

"Do you think Morlock could have started his plan?" the blond Russian said.

"I don't know," Dabori whispered. "He could have. I know it was to be soon."

"You mean you think they have all gone to start whatever their plan is?" Maxine asked.

"It is a possibility," Illya said. "We have no idea what the plan is."

"How can we find out?" Solo spoke quietly to Dabori.

The hunchback shrugged. "The Inner Council. They are the only ones who would know, and they will be very hard to reach, very dangerous."

"Can you get us to them?" Illya said.

"I can take you as far as I know," Dabori said. "That is to a chamber

I have seen them enter. The chamber is not where they meet, but it must lead to where they meet. It is always empty after they enter, and there must be some secret exit because they do not come back out for a long time."

"Let's find out," Solo said.

Dabori nodded and, when they reached a cross corridor in the maze of thick concrete tunnels and lead-lined rooms, led them down the corridor to the right. They twisted and turned through the catacomb of concrete. Still they met no one, heard no one. Maxine became nervous.

"It's not right," the THRUSH agent said. "It's not natural to meet no guards, hear nothing, Napoleon."

"Until we know better, let's be thankful," Solo remarked.

"Unless we are too late," Illya said grimly.

They moved on through the silent tunnels with Illya's words in their minds. Already hell could be breaking loose above, and they would be trapped down here—safe, but for how long? They would survive the holocaust above, but there was not one of them who thought they would be welcome guests of Morlock The Great.

"There," Dabori said.

They had reached a widening of the corridor, a long, narrow room of benches and tables, obviously a kind of dining hall, to be used during the long, lonely days of waiting for the surface to be safe again. Doors were cut into the concrete walls. It was a small door to their left that Dabori pointed to.

The door, when Solo tried it, was locked.

"Stand back," Solo said.

He placed another strip of heat foil on the lock and pulled the metallic cord. The foil burst into white heat. The door melted around the lock. The four hurried through into a small, empty room. Solo indicated the four smooth walls.

"Look for a secret door," Solo said.

The voice that answered was not one of the other three. It was a voice from nowhere.

"Spare yourself, Mr. Solo," the sardonic voice said. "I will show you where the door is."

There was a rumble of concrete and the wall on the left slid, moved and there was a door leading into blackness. The voice was faintly mocking.

"Voila, gentlemen, and lady—the door!"

Illya, crouched, let his eyes search the walls all around. There was nothing. Solo looked carefully for the source of the voice. Maxine Trent held her pistol and looked from wall to wall. Only Dabori did nothing. The hunchback stood there calmly. Unafraid, but aware that there was nothing to be done.

The voice spoke. "You wish to see me? That could be arranged, but what is the point, gentlemen?

We have you now. Look behind you."

They looked.

In the doorway through which they had entered the small room there were a horde of shaggy-haired creatures whose eyes seemed to glow in the dark.

"Take them!" the voice commanded.

Illya and Solo raised their weapons. There was a puff of smoke that instantly filled the room. Then all went black.

* * *

AT FIRST both Solo and Illya seemed to be having the same dream. A dream filled with a face of the Devil himself bathed in a red glow. Their most deadly THRUSH enemies crowded behind the face of the Devil and fired at them. The THRUSH agents were small, tiny, and the face of the laughing Devil filled their minds.

Then they became aware that they were seated on a damp floor, and the face of the Devil became the satanic face of Morlock The Great.

The magician was not alone. Behind him his deformed, shaggy-haired guards held very efficient-looking machine pistols.

"So, gentlemen, we meet at last. Ah, you have caused me a certain trouble. That little affair in Santa Carla was most inopportune. We had to move our location."

"You should have told us it would be inconvenient," Illya said.

The tiny magician laughed. "Bravado, gentlemen? I expected more from you. Your Mr. Morgan led me to admire U.N.C.L.E. Most resourceful, that one. No one else had ever penetrated our little fortress down here." Morlock looked at Dabori. "Not counting traitors, of course. Ah, Dabori, I was worried about you. Never enough hate for the healthy and handsome. No gall."

"I am not insane," Dabori said softly.

The brilliant eyes of the tiny magician flared as he looked again at the hunchback. Dabori did not flinch. He stared back at his former leader.

"Insane," Dabori said again, softly.

Morlock drew a deep breath, smiled. "It is always the excuse of the weak and faint-hearted. So you have thrown in with the doomed ones, very well. I have no more time to waste with any of you. I don't suppose you will tell me just how much you know, how much your organizations know of my plans."

"We won't," Solo said.

Morlock nodded his grotesquely enlarged head. "I thought not. Well, I leave you now. This prison, you note, is not within my shelter. After it is all over perhaps the death from above will not reach here for some hours, even days. You will

have time to think about being almost alone as you die."

Morlock turned to go. Suddenly, Maxine Trent leaped up. None of them had been tied. The beautiful THRUSH agent stepped toward Morlock. The shaggy-haired guards rushed forward. Maxine laughed.

"Don't be a fool, Morlock! You can't hope to succeed alone. But with that powder of yours, the powder that causes those men to fire at nothing, we in THRUSH could help you gain the rule of the world!"

Morlock held his guards back. He smiled his sardonic smile at Maxine.

"Ah, THRUSH! So, the lion and the wolf lie down together against me? THRUSH and U.N.C.L.E. I must be far more powerful than I even dreamed."

Maxine stepped closer to the magician. "Listen to me, Morlock. U.N.C.L.E. knows essentially nothing. I brought them here. THRUSH can offer you real power, true mastery inside a perfect organization. U.N.C.L.E. has no idea of what your powder can do."

"And do you?" Morlock said coldly.

"We know that in our hands it would bring the world to its knees. Don't be a fool," Maxine said. "Why destroy the world when you can rule it by the threat of destruction? Why rule over a burned out cinder? Bring them under your thumb. Only THRUSH can help you. With that powder we can destroy all their defenses, take over, rule—"

Morlock's eyes flashed insanely. "They will die! All of them, the beautiful and the healthy. All the pigs who glory in the arrogance of their normalcy! We! We deformed and cast out will rule! We are the future! Our Brotherhood!"

Dabori struggled to his feet. In the pain of his twisted body the hunchbacks' voice was loud and clear.

"No! The sane do not envy. Our bodies may be twisted, but we do not wallow in self-pity! We face the world as what we are—men! Only an insane few hate as you hate."

"You can lead, join THRUSH!" Maxine cried.

"Enough!" Morlock thundered. The grotesque magician sneered at Maxine. "So beautiful and so doomed! I will deal with no one, work with no one. THRUSH is no better than U.N.C.L.E. You will all be destroyed!"

With a curse, Maxine suddenly bent and tore off her left shoe. She leaped toward Morlock. The rubber lift, and a sheath of leather, came away from her spike heel and a thin metal blade gleamed.

The Morlock guards tried to aim their weapons. But Maxine had Morlock himself between her and the guards. The guards milled. Morlock shouted. Maxine cursed. Illya

and Solo leaped to their feet. Dabori grappled with a guard.

In the wild melee, Maxine nearly reached Morlock. But a guard caught her arm and she slashed at him. Her sharpened heel stabbed into the guard, who screamed. But he had saved Morlock. Other guards forced Maxine down.

At the instant Maxine was stopped, Illya suddenly hurled himself forward and tackled Morlock around the ankles. The small Russian made no further attempt to attack. On the ground, with Morlock also on the ground in front of him, Illya smiled.

"She almost got you. I'd rather save you for an insane asylum," Illya said.

Morlock struggled up. His guards herded them all back now. The macabre magician stared down at Illya.

"So, you saved me from her? I thank you, but it will not help you. Tie them up! They cannot escape, but let us not take any further chances with them."

The guards roughly tied up the four. Then the damp stone room was empty. In the silence Maxine breathed heavily. The beautiful THRUSH agent glared at them all.

"You could have helped me, you idiots! Now look at us!"

Solo laughed. "Helping you, Maxine, is a dangerous game. No, Morlock or THRUSH, that's no choice."

"Do you have any other choice?" Maxine screamed.

"Well," Solo said, "perhaps we do."

And he showed his free hands to them all. In one hand was a tiny razor in the shape of a fingernail. His ropes were neatly cut through.

THREE

IN THE silence of the slimy room, Solo stood up and bent to use his fingernail razor on the ropes that bound his feet. Then he freed Illya and Dabori. He replaced the innocent seeming fingernail-razor in his pocket.

"They tied us up too fast. Usually they would see the razor, but I thought they might miss it this time," Solo said.

"I always said you can think very well at times," Illya said.

"Thank you," Solo said.

"My pleasure," Illya said. "But what do we do now?"

Solo looked around the dark room. "Well, I would say we find a way out."

Dabori limped slowly around

the walls. "If we can escape from this room, I think I can get us out. But I do not know this particular room. I must find my bearings."

"Then we better get out of this room," Solo said.

"That seems reasonable," Illya said. "What do we have?"

"Well, they left me the heat foil," Solo said.

Illya shook his head. "There isn't a door, just a stone slab. This is an ancient room. What about explosives?"

"I've got my belt," Solo said. "But if we blow the door, we don't know who is outside. It won't do us any good to blow out and walk right into their hands."

"Then we better get them into the room," Illya said.

"Perhaps some smoke?" Solo suggested.

"That might work. They don't care about us, but it could make them curious, Napoleon," Illya agreed.

"Smoke then," Solo said, "and a small explosion. Let's have your cuff-link. You better keep the other, and I've got mine."

Illya removed one of his tiny cuff-link bombs and handed it to Solo. The agent took the bomb and set it as far away from the stone slab entrance as possible. Then he crossed the room to the slab and bent down. He felt in front of the crack beneath the slab.

"Draft blowing out," Solo said. "It should work. When I drop the smoke bomb everyone start yelling as loud as he can. Illya, you get ready to set off the bomb when they come in."

"Check," Illya said.

Illya went to the small cuff-link bomb. Solo stepped back from the stone entrance slab. He looked around once to be sure all was ready, then pulled off his tie clip and hurled it to the floor directly in front of the slab.

A thick cloud of smoke billowed up instantly in front of the stone slab. In the dank dungeon Solo, Illya and Dabori began to shout, yelling, as if in frantic panic.

For a moment nothing happened. The thick smoke choked them as they shouted, but the draft from the old dungeon was sucking the smoke under the slab.

Then there was noise outside, and the slab began to swing inward. Four armed guards ran through the opening into the slimy dungeon.

Illya set off the tiny cuff-link bomb.

The explosion rocked the ancient stone room. Two of the *morlocks* fell, blown down by the explosion as they limped in. Solo grappled with the third, and Dabori leaped on the fourth.

Solo chopped down his *morlock* with a single karate blow to the throat.

The hunchback wrestled his man to the floor. The *morlock* attempted to use his machine pistol. Dabori wrested it from him and smashed

the *morlock* across the head. The *morlock* lay still. Dabori stood up.

"Quick!" Solo cried. "Get their weapons and let's go!"

Illya, Solo and Dabori scooped up the four pistols. Solo carried two weapons. The three men dashed for the open stone slab. Two more *morlocks* appeared in the opening. In complete silence, Solo and Illya leaped on them and clubbed them down with the machine pistols.

No more *morlocks* came.

"Which way?" Solo said.

Dabori peered out through the opening. The eyes of the hunchback glistened.

"Left! I recognize the corridor."

"Now," Illya said, "before more guards come."

The three men stepped into the opening. Behind them there was a loud swearing. Maxine Trent, where she was still tied like a bundle, swore at them.

"Cut me loose, damn you!" Maxine shouted.

Solo turned, grinned. "Sorry Maxine dear. You didn't turn out to be a very helpful partner. I think you'll be cosy right where you are."

Maxine squirmed in her bonds. "Napoleon! You wouldn't!"

"But I would," Solo grinned. "Have patience. We'll probably be back for you."

"Napoleon!" Maxine screamed. "Damn you! I'll kill you for this! I'll—"

The beautiful THRUSH agent squirmed in her bonds, cursed, flopped on the floor like a furious seal. Solo laughed as he went out through the opening into the dim light of the corridor. He followed Illya and Dabori along the corridor at a slow trot, the hunchback limping valiantly to keep the pace.

Behind them Maxine's curses echoed like the wail of an outraged banshee.

FOUR

THE THREE men moved as fast as Dabori could trot. The hunchback led them down the new corridors with the softly purring air vents. Again they saw no guards, but this time they could hear noise and voices somewhere in the distance toward where the long dining room was.

"It is a conference," Dabori said. "That is where they meet. And that is why we have met no guards."

"How much farther before we can get out of the new part?" Solo said.

"Not far, but they will discover our escape at any—"

The sudden clanging of the alarms drowned the next words of the hunchback. Their escape had been discovered.

They began to run, Solo helping Dabori along the dim corridors. Two *morlocks* appeared from a side corridor. Solo and Illya fired at the same instant. The *morlocks* went down.

They jumped over the fallen en-

emy and ran on; no more need for care or silence.

But the search for them was at the other end of the secret shelter. Once they heard the boom of Morlock The Great's voice from the distance, urging his men to find them, but they saw no more guards before they reached another door that led into the old dungeons and the sewer.

Dabori had a key to this door, too.

"I think they will be watching the other way," Dabori said. "They do not know about this way."

The door led into a storeroom piled with food for the survival of the *morlocks*, and, across the room, behind giant cases of canned water, Dabori indicated a loose stone in the wall. Together they pulled it out, crawled through, and replaced the stone.

They were in another low room that had not been seen by human eyes for centuries. The dust lay a foot deep on the stone floor. Dabori pointed to the far end where there was a low archway. They went through the archway and down a circular stone staircase. At the bottom there was the last door.

Solo burned the door open and they emerged again in the sewers of London. Ten minutes later they came out into the mud at the edge of the river. The Thames stretched dark in the night. Together, the three climbed up the enbankment to dry land.

"We must get the police!" Dabori said.

Illya shook his head. "No time now. With us loose, Morlock will move even faster. We don't know what he plans or where it will happen."

Dabori was desperate. "But what can we do then? We must do something. We are out, but . . ."

Solo smiled in the night. "We follow Morlock, right, Illya?"

Dabori blinked under his mop of shaggy *morlock* hair. "Follow? But how—"

"I think Illya has arranged that, eh, Illya?" Solo said.

"Of course," the small Russian said. "Come on."

Illya led them through the streets and past the now dark and silent pub with its blazoned sign, *The End Of The World*. When they reached a building a block past the public house, Illya stopped and looked at Solo.

"There?" Illya said.

His hand pointed to one of the ruins still left from the second world war. It had been a church, and was now only rubble and jagged walls against the night sky. Solo nodded.

"By distance from the river, and general location, that should be right above the Cult shelter," Solo agreed.

"It would be just the place they would pick," Illya said. "I don't imagine anyone in the whole city knows what is down there. And we

don't have any time to waste, do we? Napoleon, you better get us a helicopter, and quite fast. I'm getting a signal!"

In the hands of Illya Kuryakin a miniature gauge had appeared. Paul Dabori looked at the gauge, and at Illya. The gauge had a white dial with black numbers and a black pointer. Closed, it seemed no more than a cigarette lighter, and there was a small receptacle attached that was empty now.

Illya smiled. "When I tackled Morlock, I managed to plant the sensor on his trouser leg. A radioactive sensor. This gauge picks it up as far away as fifteen miles. You see, we don't know where he is going, so I thought we would probably have to follow him."

"The gauge is moving!" Dabori said.

"Yes," Illya said. "Morlock is coming out."

Bent over his ring transmitter-receiver, Solo called for help. "London Control, this is Sonny. Come in, London Control. Sonny and Bubba, Mayday. Come in, London Control!"

The ring seemed to speak. "London Control. Go ahead, Sonny."

"Request helicopter. Repeat. Request helicopter immediately," and Solo gave the location.

"Helicopter at the river near *The End Of The World*. Roger, Sonny. Helicopter already in area; will be there in two minutes!"

"Over and out," Solo said.

Illya watched his gauge. "He's out!"

The three men ducked down in the shelter of a doorway. From the ruins of the church across the street four men appeared as if by magic. Three were *morlocks,* armed and wary, and the fourth was Morlock The Great himself. The four walked quickly to a long black car that suddenly glided down the street.

Solo pointed upward. "There!"

The helicopter circled the area, keeping well away until the black car had pulled away and vanished toward the west. Then the helicopter swooped down toward the river. Illya, Solo and Dabori hurried down the dark city street to the river. The helicopter floated on the river.

"Paul," Illya said to Dabori, "this time you must stay here. Watch the old church until we get back."

Dabori nodded. The hunchback stepped back and smiled at Illya and Solo as the two agents waded through the mud and swam to the helicopter. Aboard, the helicopter lifted off at once.

"Where to?" the pilot said.

Illya looked at his gauge. "West, about fifty miles an hour, make a zigzag and stay ten miles back. I'll guide you."

"Roger," the pilot said.

The helicopter swung off to the west across the great city. Illya and Solo bent close over the gauge that tracked Morlock The Great.

ACT IV

NOT WITH A BANG BUT A SCREAM

THROUGH THE dark English night the chase continued. Hours had passed and still the dial of Illya's gauge showed Morlock and his men driving west. The car, some ten miles ahead, was driving fast. In the helicopter, by the light of the instrument panel, Solo and Illya bent over a map.

"He's heading in the general direction of his Salisbury house," Solo said.

"Where he most surely has another atom bomb shelter," Illya pointed out.

"But how does he plan to start a war out here?" Solo said.

"The naval base at Portsmouth?" Illya said.

"Not near enough."

"Some installation at Southampton?"

"Possibly, but—" Solo began.

"He's turning off!" Illya said, his eyes on his gauge.

The dial on the gauge indicated that Morlock The Great had turned his car and was not heading sharply north. The pilot swung the helicopter in pursuit.

The first faint grey of dawn was just tinging the eastern sky when the pilot suddenly spoke.

"You say he's out to start a war?" the pilot said.

"We think so," Illya said.

"Then I think I know where he's going," the pilot said. "On your map. You see the town of Colingbrane?"

"Yes," Illya said.

"Well, it won't show on your map, but there's an IRBM missile base at Colingbrane. According to our information, the missiles are hot, are aimed at major Soviet cities!"

"Then that's it!" Solo said. "How close is Morlock?"

"A few miles from the town," Illya said, looking at both his gauge and the map.

"But how does he figure on starting anything?" the pilot said. "Those missiles don't go without a call on the hot line from the top. The base has world-wide communications and missile tracking. They can't be surprised, and they can't fire without clearance from the top. Only the general has control of the firing button."

"Foolproof?" Illya said, his voice a question.

"I'd say so," the pilot said.

"No," Illya said. "Nothing is foolproof, because there are always fools. In everything there must be a human element, no matter how small, and what one human can make almost perfect, another can always destroy by locating the tiniest flaw."

"Well—" the pilot began.

"Illya!" Solo warned, pointed down to the gauge in the blond Russian's hand.

The gauge showed that Morlock

had stopped. The helicopter was closing in rapidly.

"Set down right on top of them!" Illya snapped.

The two agents prepared their weapons, leaned out the windows of the lowering helicopter. A very faint grey light revealed the black car parked below at the edge of a high fence. Beyond the fence there was nothing but houses and trees and small hills.

But the trained eyes of Solo and Illya saw that the houses inside the high fences were not houses. The trees were newly planted. The small hills were not hills but mounds covered with sod.

That was all they had time to see. As the helicopter swooped down, hovered over the car, *morlocks* came out into the open. Exposed, in the open, and stupidly fearless, they raised their weapons to fire.

They never fired.

Illya leaned out of the copter, dropped a small cylinder that exploded with a silent puff. The gas spread incredibly fast, and the *morlocks* slumped to the earth, asleep.

"Set us down," Illya said to the pilot.

The helicopter touched down just outside the fence. The fence, the two agents knew, would be electrified. They took their tools and weapons and turned to run toward the fence.

Solo instructed the pilot. "They'll have picked you up on their radar. Take off, but stay around. Let them catch you a mile or so away. Don't talk for a half an hour; that should give us time. If it doesn't, it won't matter by then."

"You are so encouraging, Napoleon," Illya said.

"A realist, my Russian friend. Come on."

The helicopter took off. Already they could see two jet fighters approaching high in the dawn sky. Solo and Illya, hidden in the grass, watched as the jets swooped in and forced the copter to land again a mile away.

Then they moved off along the fence.

The base was a friendly base, and the soldiers on guard would be their soldiers, but the soldiers would not know this, and the two U.N.C.L.E. agents did not have time to convince them. At the fence they went to work.

The fence was electrified and wired for alarm. Swiftly they attached special circuit loops to the wires they planned to cut so that no circuit would be broken. Then they shunted off the wires they would cut. Using insulated cutters and gloves, they cut just two wires, and squeezed through without touching the fence again.

Inside, they moved at a trot through the dawn light. The gauge in Illya's hand led them unerringly across the missile base, among the camouflaged silos, toward wherev-

er Morlock The Great was working his deadly plan.

Twice they had to shoot guards with their sleep darts. The soldiers fell without a sound and the two agents moved on. The gauge led them directly to what looked like a simple English country house. There were two guards at the door. Illya and Solo crept closer.

The two guards did not move. They were dead.

"Morlock," Illya said.

"Yes, and that means he's inside," Solo said.

Without saying any more to show their thoughts that even now they could be too late, Illya and Solo entered the building and moved along the dim dawn hallways. They found deserted offices, empty halls, silent rooms.

"Even at dawn the base should be active," Illya said.

"Below?" Solo said. "That's where the control would be."

"And where Morlock is," Illya said, pointing to his gauge.

They followed the gauge until they located the heavy door that led down into the bowels of the earth where the heart of the missile base would be. The door was locked. It was an extra-heavy door, made of some strong metal. Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo looked at each other.

"Alloy steel, from the look of it," Solo said.

"Will our thermite melt it?" Illya said.

"I don't know. We may have to blow it."

"Try the thermite. We can't warn Morlock," Illya said.

Solo pressed the foil to the door over the lock, pulled the metal fuse. The white-hot glow filled the dawn hallway.

When the foil burned out there was a hole, but the door was still locked.

"Again," Illya said.

The second foil glowed in the dim dawn light of the silent corridor. The hole in the alloy steel door grew deeper, wider, and, then, was through. The door swung silently open.

Illya and Solo faced a small antechamber—and a second door!

"Elevator," Illya said.

"But there has to be a stair also," Solo said. "They wouldn't have only one way down. Electrical systems can fail."

"There," Illya pointed to a flat panel that had a button beside it, an emergency stairway.

This door was much thinner and the thermite bit through with dispatch. The door opened and Illya and Solo plunged quickly down a narrow, winding staircase. At the bottom there was another steel door—but this door was open!

They went through and found themselves on a kind of balcony—a circular gallery that ran around the walls above a large room. They looked over the edge at the room below.

The sight that met their eyes made them stare in horror.

TWO

"MASKS!" ILLYA barked.

The two agents quickly put on the small gas masks they carried for just such an emergency. Wearing their masks, they peered down at the scene on the floor below.

The room was the central control of the IRBM missile base. A giant illuminated plastic map covered the far end of the room. The most sophisticated tracking instruments lined the left wall—radar, DEW Line relays, telemetric relays from all across the world. A long table filled the center of the room. A row of telephones was at the right—the red telephone standing out like some malignant monster.

But it was not the room itself that chilled the U.N.C.L.E. agents. It was the men in the room—the frantic men.

At the giant map enlisted men with long pointers were tracking the moving lights that indicated the incoming enemy missiles detected by the tracking instruments. The men at the map were wild with excitement, shouting, screaming out the progress of the enemy. A mad, wild excitement mixed with a thick odor of fear.

At the tracking instruments the operators were equally excited, calling out the blips on the radar, relaying the messages of the reports from across the world. The enemy missiles were pouring in all over the world, were being tracked by the radar in the room, by the radar at other installations, by the Distant Early Warning line far up in Canada. The operators on the machines shouted their progress in mounting panic.

"A thousand miles!"

"Nine hundred!"

"Closing in on England now—five hundred miles!"

"Closing on Washington!"

"Four hundred miles!"

At the long table officers, pale and anxious, sat with their portfolios open, staring at the map and at the radar alternately like the audience at a tennis match.

There was fear on their faces, but there was also determination. Clear on the faces of all the officers was the absolute determination that, destroyed though they would be, they would do their final duty and take the enemy to destruction with them.

And at the red telephone there was one man. A man with a greater look of determination on his face than any one else in the madhouse of the room. A man wearing the uniform of a general. A man with his hand on the red telephone.

A man who, as Illya and Solo watched, heard the telephone ring.

There was a silence, sudden as death, in the control room.

The general picked up the red telephone.

"Yes sir. I know, sir. In five minutes they'll know what they started."

The general lowered the red telephone and turned to face the room, where the men at the map still followed the progress of the incoming missiles, where the radar men tracked the enemy, where the communications men received the reports from the rest of the world, where officers waited for the command to fire their own missiles.

Only—

There were no lights moving on the giant map.

There were no blips on the radar screens.

There were no messages on the instruments relaying from other bases.

The red telephone had not rung.

In the room, Illya and Solo saw, only the men were active, were moving—the instruments and the map were dark and silent.

And, unseen in a distant corner, was the small black-cloaked, satanic figure of Morlock The Great!

In the air was the diabolical powder thrown by the insane magician.

In the silent room nothing happened, but the men in the room, frantic, saw it all happening in some giant hallucination.

The general walked to the red button that would fire all his missiles into the heart of the Soviet Union.

The general took his key from his pocket to unlock the red fire button.

Illya and Solo saw that there was no time to bring the frantic soldiers from the nightmare. Taking careful aim, they both fired at once.

The sleep darts struck the general, who gasped once and collapsed on the floor.

An officer, seeing the general fall, ran forward and reached for the key.

Solo shot him in the neck. He collapsed, asleep.

In the room pandemonium broke loose.

Morlock The Great, crouched in his corner, was cursing, firing at the two agents now. Illya tossed a sleep-gas cylinder, and another. The gas filled the room.

Men fell all across the room.

One more officer made a frantic last attempt to unlock the red fire button—and fell to the floor before he could.

In the room there was now complete silence.

The men all slept.

The machines that had been silent were still silent.

The red fire button was still locked, and the red telephone stood silent.

Illya and Solo stood up on the balcony. It was over. There would be no atomic war today. But tomorrow?

"Where is he?" Solo said.

They both looked to where Mor-

lock The Great had been firing at them. The spot was empty now. Behind the place, in the steel walls, a door stood open, a door into a black hole.

"The elevator!" Illya cried. "He was standing at the elevator. He got away!"

"Then we better get him!" Solo said.

Illya pulled out his tracking gauge. The dial showed that Morlock The Great was above them somewhere, above and moving away.

The two agents did not wait to explain to the general or his men. That could wait. When the general and his men woke up, the effects of the diabolical powder would have worn off. Then there would be time for explanations.

Now Illya and Solo had a man to catch. They raced back up the stairs and out into the bright sun of morning.

THREE

THE MISSILE base was still quiet and undisturbed. All the action below had not ruffled the surface. But already men were moving, the day shift getting ready to take over the endless job of doing nothing but wait for a disaster that, if it happened, none would be likely to survive. An endless, terrible job, where a man could not even hope for action since, when action came, it would be the end.

Illya and Solo moved as swiftly as they could and still remain unseen. They checked the dial on their tracking gauge and saw that Morlock was apparently heading straight back to his car. The magician seemed to need no help, could move unseen wherever he wished. Illya and Solo trotted toward the same spot.

Then they were seen!

But the soldiers who converged on them did not fire. It was clear at once that the soldiers knew who they were, and that they were friends.

A jeep raced up. In it was the helicopter pilot and four officers.

"The jet guys forced me down. I got a going over, but I finally convinced these boys to call Washington direct and we're all cleared. What happened."

Illya and Solo explained. Two of the officers ran off toward the control center. The other two waited. Illya checked his gauge.

"He's in his car, moving away fast. Come on; we'll have to borrow the jeep."

The two officers, armed, the pilot, and Illya and Solo, roared off in the jeep. The gauge of the tracking instrument showed Morlock moving fast, about four miles ahead. They passed where the black car had been. It was gone. The four *morlocks* still lay asleep.

"He's heading for his house," Solo said as he looked at the tracking gauge.

"Then we had better get there with him," Illya said.

But they did not make it. At the old gothic house five miles from Salisbury the car was parked, but there was no sign of Morlock The Great. Solo looked at Illya.

"Below? In the shelter?"

Illya shook his head, studied his dial. "No. The gauge shows that he is over there, to the left about a mile."

They all turned to look. The land was flat in that direction, and there was nothing in sight. Not a house, not a trace of a human being.

"The gauge is working. He has to be out there."

"Let's find out, then," Solo said.

The five men moved at a fast walk out toward where the gauge said they would find Morlock The Great. When they were still a half a mile from the spot, a small aircraft appeared on the flat land. Its motor was running. Before the five men could run to the spot, the small plane raced down its runway and rose into the air. Illya looked at his gauge. It showed that Morlock was in the plane.

"He's gone," Illya said.

Solo bent over his ring radio. "London Control! Come in, London Control, Sonny here. Code One!"

Instantly the ring answered. "London Control, Code One, all facilities alert."

"Morlock The Great escaped in a light plane. No destination known, but probably London. Notify police, Interpol, and organize an intercept. Alert Mr. Waverly in New York. Sonny and Bubba returning to London."

Solo clicked off, and the five men returned to the jeep. A half an hour later they were in the helicopter again, flying toward London.

* * *

IN THE RARE London sunny day, Solo and Illya approached the ruined old church that stood above the underground complex of the Cult. The tracking gauge in Illya's hand showed that, somewhere far below, Morlock The Great was still in the city. Solo looked for their friend, Paul Dabori. The hunchback was not in sight.

"He should have been here," Solo said.

"Yes, but we have more important problems," Illya said. The blond Russian nodded toward the ruins of the church. "There is something odd over there."

Illya led the way across the street and into the ruins of the old church. There was a clear space in the rubble that had not been there before. Somehow, the rubble itself seemed to have moved.

"The rubble was camouflage," Illya said. "Real rubble and bricks on a movable platform."

In the center of the clear space that had not been there before, a

large slab of stone lay heavy and flat. The altar stone, but not where it had been. Where it had been was now a gaping hole in the earth.

"The stone was under the rubble," Solo said.

"It must work electronically. Much too heavy to be moved any other way."

The two agents surveyed the hole in the ground that led downward—a flight of narrow stone steps.

"This they didn't build," Illya said. "It's an old hideaway, built under the altar."

Solo took a breath. "Well, he's down there. Shall we wait for Mr. Waverly and help?"

"We missed him at Salisbury. I don't think we have time to wait," Illya said.

Solo checked his Special. "Let's go then."

The two agents started down the stairs into the ancient hideaway under the altar.

At first it was pitch dark. Then, as their eyes became accustomed, they saw that they were indeed in a very old stone room. They followed the homing signal to a blank wall. Solo felt carefully around. Four feet from the floor there was a tiny projection. The projection was metal and not at all ancient.

Solo pulled it. The wall slid silently open. The two agents looked at a shaft. Illya peered over the edge. Far below there seemed to be a dark object. Cables ran down the shaft.

"Elevator, at the bottom," Illya said.

"If we bring it up we'll alert them," Solo said.

"Then I expect we shall have to go down to it," Illya said.

With no more words, Kuryakin swung out on the cables and began to slide down. Solo followed. The two men slid carefully, breaking themselves to prevent their hands being burned raw by friction.

At the bottom they crouched on the top of the elevator car. Silently, Illya opened the roof hatch. The car below was empty. They lowered themselves in and pressed the open button. A long, darkened corridor stretched before them. One of the new concrete bomb shelter corridors.

Once again, all was silent.

They left the elevator and moved along the dim corridor. The forced air vents hummed above their heads. Illya watched his gauge, letting it lead them closer and closer to Morlock The Great.

"The left corridor," Illya said.

They turned down the left corridor.

"Now right," Illya said.

It was at the end of this right corridor that they first heard the sound. A distant rumbling like a powerful engine, and, below the rumbling a sound like the sea far off on a stormy day. Solo held up his hand. They both listened.

"What do you think it is?" Illya said.

"A motor, real powerful motors, and—" Solo said.

"And voices, a lot of voices!"

Solo nodded. The rumbling of motors, and the sound that was many voices, came no closer. But even as they listened in the dim corridor, two *morlocks* suddenly appeared from a door in the wall in front of them.

The *morlocks,* hurrying, and the two agents saw each other at the same time.

The *morlocks* were too slow.

Illya and Solo stepped over their bodies and went on down the corridor. They had used sleep darts and there had been no sound. But Illya stopped, looked at his gauge.

"We're going away!"

Kuryakin turned and retraced his steps. When he reached the door the two *morlocks* had come from he stopped again. He pointed at the door.

"In there, Napoleon. But not close."

Solo stepped past and opened the door.

A narrower, brighter corridor led downward at a sharp slant. As the two agents moved silently along this different-looking passage, the sounds of engines and voices grew louder. The two agents nodded to each other. At least it was becoming clear that they were going in the right direction.

"From the sound of it," Solo whispered, "they may all be up ahead."

"We'll need the sleep-gas bombs again," Illya said.

"And a little luck. Dabori said there could be a hundred," Solo said.

The passage continued downward. A chill grew in the draft of air that was now coming along the passage.

"This passage connects to outside!" Solo said.

"Morlock would have an escape route, Napoleon," Illya said.

The voices seemed very close now, and the throb of powerful engines. Then, suddenly, Illya stopped again. He stared down at his gauge.

"We've passed him again," Illya said.

The blond agent returned up the passage and stopped at a spot where there was nothing at all—blank wall on either side, and smooth floor and ceiling. Illya narrowed his eyes and began to feel the walls.

"Here!" Illya whispered. "Be ready! The gauge says he's very close, right behind this wall. I feel a lever."

Illya pulled the lever and the wall slid open. A very narrow opening, and on the other side only darkness. The two agents peered in.

The shouts came loud from the end of the main passage. From both ends of the passage, the *morlocks* were roaring in fury and rushing toward them. There was no time to hesitate.

"Inside!" Illya cried.

The two agents dashed through the small opening in the side wall —and stepped out into space.

With cries of surprise, Illya and Solo fell down through the pitch dark.

FOUR

STUNNED, the two agents lay on what seemed to be a dirt floor. Nothing moved in the dark. The only sound was the sound of motors not far away, and the rumbling sound of the *morlock* voices.

Solo was the first to revive. He sat up and switched on his miniature ring-flashlight. They were, he saw, in a deep pit. The floor was dirt, but the sides were stone. Above, far above, the ceiling was stone, and halfway up was the black shape of the opening they had been so cleverly forced through.

Illya's voice spoke beside Solo. "Look!"

"What?"

"Shine it left, on the floor," Illya said.

Solo shined the light. In the center of the pit-like room where they lay on the dirt there was a small metal pillar, like a receptacle for burning incense.

It stood only two feet high and had a flat top. On the flat top was a tiny object.

The two men looked at the object.

"The homer," Illya said. "It's the device I attached to Morlock The Great's cuff."

There was a loud, mocking laugh.

It came from above, from the opposite side of the pit from where they had plunged down. Solo shone his lights up. As he did so light flooded the entire pit from spotlights up in the ceiling. The two agents blinked in the bright glare.

The sardonic laugh came again.

On a wide ledge halfway up the sheer stone walls they saw once again the tiny, grotesque figure of Morlock The Great. The magician stared down at them.

"You did very well, gentlemen. I underestimated you badly. But, then, you now have underestimated me. I admit I was stupid to let you plant that device on me, but you were stupid to think that I would not detect it in the end. So, now here we are."

"And without an atomic war," Solo pointed out.

Morlock laughed, his over-large head shaking on his skinny midget body. "True. I failed this time. But I have you. I will not fail next time, but for you two I fear there will be no next time. I do not intend to make the same error again —the error of leaving you alive behind me, I mean."

"We are not alone," Illya said coldly.

"U.N.C.L.E.? Yes, they will send more men, but I think you two are the most dangerous. The

others I can handle," Morlock said. "I am in no hurry, really. We are all prepared, the shelters are ready. All that has happened is that we have lost our good London shelter, and—"

"Don't be stupid, Morlock," Solo said. "You're known, and so is your plan. Every government will be after you. You won't be able—"

"So," Morlock said, "you have reported. Unfortunate. Still, it is not as bad as you hope, I'm sorry to tell you. They will not find me, and we will start again."

"Where can you hide now?" Illya said, mocked.

The grotesque figure on the ledge only laughed his sardonic laugh.

"Ah, gentlemen, where I can hide is my secret. But I admit, freely, that you have caused me much trouble. Yes, much trouble. I will not let you off lightly. So, *Voila!*"

The grotesque magician waved his tiny hand. There was a puff of smoke on the floor and *morlocks* appeared as if from nowhere. Before Illya or Solo could move they were pinioned by strong hands, something was looped around one of each of their legs. Another flash of smoke, and the *morlocks* vanished.

"You must admire my tricks, gentlemen," Morlock said from his ledge. "I am the greatest magician."

Solo and Illya were too busy looking at what had been done to their legs. They looked at each other, puzzled. The *morlocks* had chained one leg of each of them—chained securely and on long chains that clanked when they moved. The *morlocks* had also removed all clothes but their underwear.

"Your clothes appear to be far too dangerous," Morlock said drily from his ledge. "Are the chains comfortable? As you see, you have quite free movement. So, now, *Ole!*"

And the tiny magician gestured again with his hand. There was another flash of flame and smoke, and the sound of water. Fast, inrushing water. Illya and Solo stood up. Water was gushing around their feet, pouring into the room.

On the ledge the insane little magician choked with demonic laughter. "A swim, eh? A nice swim. You are quite free to swim, to fight, until— But you must have guessed, yes? Until the chains reach their limit!"

The water gushed up. It had reached their waists now. Illya bent, struggled with the chain on his leg. Solo watched the tiny magician laughing on his ledge.

"You can fight, you see? Ah, that is the pleasure! To watch you struggle, and you *will* struggle because you are alive! No simple drowning, not for you! You will swim, and thrash, and then the chain will hold you, the water will rise, and you will go under. When the water reaches my feet—your heads will go under and you will die! Die!"

The water rose higher and higher, and the two agents were swimming now. The chain on only one leg did not prevent them from swimming on the surface of the rising water.

Morlock roared with laughter on his ledge.

In the distance, suddenly, there was the sound of firing. Doors crashed. The voices of men reached their ears above the sound of inrushing water. On the ledge the monstrous little magician listened. He seemed to be estimating. His laughter was gone. He stared down at them from his glowing, satanic eyes.

"Your friends, but they will not be in time. My men will hold them until I escape, and by then you will be under the water."

The water rose swiftly. The two agents struggled to swim, to break the chains. Morlock leaned down toward them as they floated up toward his ledge.

"You destroyed my plans! You stopped me! I will win, but you have ruined it all for now! So you will die! You will all die and we outcast and spit-upon will inherit the Earth! !"

Struggling, Solo and Illya looked at each other. Their heads were nearly up to the ledge. Each man could feel the chain reaching its end, dragging now on their thrashing legs. Another few minutes and the chains would be fully extended —and then—

On the ledge the water lapped at the feet of Morlock The Great. The grotesque magician laughed once more.

"We will rule the earth!" Morlock cried, and once again his hand described an arc in the air. "Farewell, dead men, *Voila!*"

The tiny hand made its magic gesture.

There was a puff of bright red smoke, and—

A sheet of flame shot to the ceiling of the stone pit.

Inside the flame, his clothes a holocaust, Morlock The Great screamed and screamed.

There was the puff of smoke, and where there should have been nothing and no one, where Morlock The Great should have vanished in his puff of smoke—there was a great sheet of flame and the tiny magician, his eyes a mask of terror, turned into a human torch before the eyes of Solo and Illya struggling in the water.

With a final scream of horror and pain, Morlock The Great leaped into the water.

It did not help. The flame did not go out, and, on the surface, Morlock The Great burned like a torch.

Solo and Illya stared, struggled, fought to keep their heads above water.

Then they felt it—the water was receding.

On the ledge where Morlock The Great had played his last trick, they saw the twisted body, and gentle

face, of Paul Dabori. The *morlock* who had come to their aid smiled down as they floated down with the receding water.

* * *

IN THE long conference room of the Cult shelter deep beneath the city of London, Solo and Illya sat in dry clothes and listened to the dry voice of Alexander Waverly. The chief was having difficulty lighting his pipe.

"You see, your friend Paul Dabori decided to slip back after you went off in chase of Morlock. It seems he decided that with all that hair he would not be recognized, especially after you all escaped."

Dabori smiled. "They never suspected I had come back down here. When Morlock came running back, there was much confusion. I followed him to his private room. When he wasn't looking, I replaced some of his special smoke powder with some of your heat-foil. I tore up the foil, and mixed it with his smoke powder. I'm afraid it fixed him."

Waverly managed to get his pipe alight. "So, when you gentlemen were, shall we say, at the end of your—uh—rope, Morlock could not resist one last disappearance, and set off his smoke act. Unfortunately, this time Dabori had mixed him something a little stronger than smoke. You saw the result, I believe."

"And I knew where the valves were for that pit," Dabori said.

Solo raised an eyebrow. "If you need work, I think we could use you, Mr. Dabori."

The hunchback shook his head. "No, I will return to my own work, I think. I want to live quietly, usefully now. Of course, first I will get a haircut!"

Solo laughed. Illya looked seriously at his Chief. Waverly, his bloodhound face impassive, puffed quietly on his pipe. All around them the London police were herding *morlocks* away.

"Did you get them all?" Illya said.

"We did. They had a submarine. That was the motors you heard. But they were still waiting for Morlock himself when we broke in. When they saw his body, all fight went out of them. I don't think we will have any more trouble with them. I'm afraid many of them will need mental care, though," Waverly said.

"And the powder? The powder that induced the hallucinations?" Illya said.

"We have it all. We will analyze it, of course, but then it will be destroyed," Waverly said.

Suddenly, Solo jumped up. The chief agent looked all around the room. He seemed to be looking for someone.

"Maxine!" Solo said. "We forgot Maxine!"

Alexander Waverly studied his

pipe. "No, we picked her up where you had left her."

"I'll bet she was annoyed," Solo grinned. "We have her?"

Waverly coughed, "Ah, no, I'm afraid she's slipped us again. A very resourceful woman. It seems she had a hidden hypodermic and knocked out our guards. She escaped, and with some of the hallucination powder. She—"

Illya sat up. "THRUSH has a sample of that powder?"

A smile split Waverly's impassive face. "Yes and no. The Trent woman did escape with a sample. But, fortunately, I had taken the precaution of removing the real powder. I hope THRUSH will not be too disappointed with their sample of the simple smoke powder Morlock liked to use, poor man."

Solo and Illya grinned at each other. Solo, his boyish face smiling, wondered just what THRUSH would say after their experts ran exhaustive tests on what would turn out to be simple smoke powder.

Solo decided that Maxine would have a few bad moments. But Maxine Trent had a charmed life. Solo knew that he would see her again.

Illya Kuryakin was busy studying the records of the late, and very unlamented Morlock The Great.

The grotesque magician himself was a charred corpse in a tiny coffin on its way to the London morgue.

NEXT MONTH'S NEW U.N.C.L.E. NOVEL:

THE GHOST RIDERS AFFAIR

Baffled, at bay, Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin faced the strangest most deadly challenge ever flung at U.N.C.L.E. by a horror-stricken world. Solve, if you can, the blood-chilling riddle of the sleek new luxury liner which sped off into the dark night on schedule—and was never seen again. Or the thousand men who left for their work—and vanished from the face of the earth!

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

A NEW MISS F. B. IVY MYSTERY NOVELET

Bier on the Rocks

The Nazi butchers had gone. But the death seeds they had sown still lived. Today a peaceful Greek island remembered—and reaped its deadly harvest.

by CHARLES VENTURA

AS THE TINY ferry neared the dock at Petris, Frances Bascom Ivy sighted the Cronins. Even at this distance, Frances could see that they both looked haggard and worried.

She looked around her at the quaintly garbed passengers and the assorted livestock the Greek villagers had brought with them on the shabby old gasoline launch, before turning back to scan her friends and the old-world backdrop of ancient stone buildings along the waterfront.

The contrast between the dreamy, peaceful scene and the news that had brought her from bustling Athens struck her forcibly.

It seemed incredible that one of Bruce Cronin's assistants had been brutally murdered in this pastoral setting. She shuddered at his telephoned description of the body a shepherd had discovered, high on the mountain that loomed above the village. There had been a tremor in his voice as he described the gruesome find.

"The killer must have been a

lunatic with a grisly sense of humor," he'd said. "Kevin Allen's body was placed head down on a makeshift catafalque of rocks that resembled a rocket-launching platform."

F. B. Ivy had been aware of Bruce Cronin's mission on the shores of the Gulf of Corinth, before his S.O.S. call to her Athens hotel. As one of a carefully screened group of secret operatives, Frances was in Greece to investigate and evaluate the forces behind the country's recent political upheaval.

Even before she had left Washington on the Greek assignment, Frances had learned that young Cronin and two assistant technicians were utilizing the incredibly clear visibility in the Gulf area to study and chart the flight of man-made satellites. With the iron-curtain countries of Bulgaria, Albania and Yugoslavia fringing the nearby borders, the project rated high as a classified operation.

While the tiny ferry was being jockeyed within rope-tossing range, a tall, fair-haired man leaped across the intervening distance onto the deck.

He reached for the redhead's overnight bag with a shy smile.

"I am Adolph Gruber," he said. "My wife and I do the housework and gardening for Mr. and Mrs. Cronin."

He steadied her arm with a strong hand as she stepped from the launch to the dock. A moment later, Frances was enveloped in a bear hug. Lisa Cronin's eyes were moist as she greeted her longtime friend and former schoolmate. Bruce gave the redhead a peck on the cheek and a hearty handshake.

The three chatted in the rambling fashion of reunited friends as they picked their way through the group of villagers on the dock and strolled down the waterfront, with Adolf and the suitcase bringing up the rear. Nothing was said of the tragedy that had brought F. B. Ivy to Petris until she had enjoyed a warm shower and was sipping a cool drink on the seaside terrace of the Cronins' villa.

Bruce sat down heavily on a neighboring deck chair. "I'm worried about Jimmy Young, my other assistant," he said. "I asked him to be sure and stick around the house until we came back from the ferry with you. Hilda just told me that she saw him walk out of our back gate with one of the village girls. That's not like Jimmy."

Lisa laughed. "Not like Jimmy? I'd say it was characteristic. Most of the village beauties pursue the handsome devil and he certainly meets them halfway. Before Kevin's death you wouldn't have given the incident a second thought." She broke off abruptly. "There goes our Hilda now for her regular communion with nature."

The trio watched the swimmer knife through the calm waters to-

ward a small, rocky island, about a quarter of a mile offshore.

Lisa explained idly, "Hilda takes a swim and a sun bath in the nude every day at the same time, providing the sun is shining, of course. All of our male star-gazers have been warned to stay away from the other side of that island between one and three each afternoon."

Bruce grinned sheepishly. "The warning came a little late for me," he said.

Lisa winked at their house guest. "This peeping Tom caught Hilda with her bikini down."

Bruce gazed after the swimmer. "Thank goodness Hilda is not the easily outraged type or we might be doing our own cooking and housework. When I swam up and found her stretched out naked on a flat rock I was so flabbergasted that I swallowed a pint of seawater before I could close my mouth."

He chuckled. "She raised herself on one elbow and said, 'I'm afraid I have embarrassed you, Mr. Cronin. I should have told Mrs. Cronin that I sunbathe here like this."

Bruce sighed. "I wish I hadn't been so busy trying to look nonchalant. I didn't get a good look before I swam away. What I saw was provocative."

The smile left his face as he turned to leave the room. "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to excuse me. I'm snowed under. Please let me know the moment Jimmy shows up. I'd like him to be here when we review the events leading up to Kevin's death."

The girls watched him disappear into the house.

Frances said, "From Bruce's glowing description I gather that Hilda is considerably younger than her husband. Adolf is obviously in the middle-age bracket."

Lisa nodded. "Hilda is in her twenties. Adolf is old enough to have served in the German army during World War Two. They met and married in Austria after he deserted from the army. We found them working in an old castle in Austria that had been transformed into a tourist hotel, and brought them here. Adolf was stationed in this very village during the Nazi occupation. Some of the tales he tells about Nazi atrocities in this area are enough to make your blood run cold."

Her face clouded. "Here I sit, prattling about our cook, when Jimmy Young may be in danger."

F. B. Ivy stirred restlessly. "Perhaps worry is contagious. Why don't we get Mr. Gruber to help us look for Jimmy? He can't have gone very far. Didn't I understand you to say that the only methods of locomotion in the village are shank's mare and riding a donkey?"

Lisa's eyes were grateful. "I was hoping you would suggest that. I sent Adolf out to do some shopping, so I'll have to saddle a brace of balky beasts. I've done it lots of times. We'll cruise through the vil-

lage and try to locate Adolf first. He may have run across Jimmy, since he left the house. Let's change into slacks first. Nothing scratches worse than donkey fuzz on bare legs."

Lisa displayed a surprising proficiency in saddling the tiny animals. They were off and trotting. Frances felt like a tipsy giant as she swayed on the squat mount, but soon became accustomed to the erratic motion.

After they had dismounted several times and peered into a number of picturesque little stores, Frances suggested they give up the search for the handyman and concentrate on the missing technician. Lisa thought the coffeehouse might be a good bet. They exhausted this possibility via the village's three cafes in less than fifteen minutes.

F. B. Ivy reined in her stubby mount as they were leaving the last of the tiny smoke-filled pubs.

"You'd better return to the house," she advised her friend. "I'll try to pry one of the coffeehouse loafers away from his dice-throwing long enough to guide me up the mountain to where Kevin was found."

She smiled at Lisa's expression. "Don't worry, honey. I can take care of myself. If anyone gets hurt in the mountains you can be sure it won't be me."

A deadly looking automatic appeared in F. B. Ivy's hand as if by magic.

Lisa gasped. "I see what you mean," she said.

II

FRANCIS IVY felt she had made a wise choice, as she jogged along the steep, treacherous mountain trail behind her recently acquired guide and his sure-footed donkey. The man ahead was a gnarled oldster, garbed in the colorful garments of the Greek shepherd. His skin had been burned to a deep leather color from the Hellenic suns.

There had been a moment of surprised silence when Frances walked in and addressed the coffeehouse's sole waiter in fluent Greek. A chorus of strident voices answered her request for a guide. The gray-haired shepherd, seated at the rear of the smoke-filled room, had caught her attention because of his picturesque garb.

As their eyes met, the shepherd smiled slightly. His smile widened when Frances pushed past the voluble and bold-eyed young men who stood in her path and walked directly to his table.

They had been jogging along in silence for some time when her guide turned in the saddle.

"This is one of the most beautiful views from the mountain," he said, as they rounded a rocky crag.

Frances gazed through the break in the towering rock canyon and saw a mosaic of tiled roofs set

against a cobalt blue sea. She smiled her appreciation. A moment later they were again hemmed in by towering stone crags.

The shepherd called back. His face was somber.

"It was my cousin, Panayotis Turla, who found the American's body," he said. "He was bringing his sheep down from higher in the mountains when he saw the buzzards circling around a small plot of grass with a strange-looking mound of stones in its center. The place is very close to here."

They had come to another break in the canyon walls. She saw the tiny patch of green he had described. As they neared the small oasis of color, she saw the oddly tilted mound in the center of the sparse grass that had been Kevin Allen's bier on the rocks.

The figure ahead of her suddenly cried out something unintelligible and kicked his donkey's sides. Frances watched the man and donkey for a moment, then urged her own mount into action. The shepherd had dismounted and was bending over the rocks when she pulled up.

Both of them gazed in horror at the figure of a man lying head-downward on the rock-shaped mound. It took only a quick look to make Frances realize that the man whose slashed throat was a mass of coagulated blood couldn't possibly be Bruce's missing assistant.

The corpse, clad in clothes identical to her shepherd guide's, was elderly and dark-visaged. Frances Ivy's experienced eye noted that the man had been dead for several hours.

Her guide's face was wooden with repressed emotion. "It is my cousin, Panayotis." He sighed and shook his head. "Like most Greeks, Panayotis talked too much. He must have told the wrong person the story he told me."

The redhead, who was examining the body, extracted a torn piece of paper and a bit of dark cloth from a dangling hand and scanned them both carefully before placing them in a pocket of her slacks. The shepherd looked at her curiously.

"I feel that I can trust you," she said. "I am a special investigator from the United States. I am hoping you will help me solve both your cousin's murder and that of the American. Perhaps you will start by telling me what your cousin said to you."

He showed his scraggly teeth in a sad smile. "I knew you were somebody special when you spoke your first words in the coffeehouse."

Averting his eyes from the maimed throat, he tenderly closed the staring eyes. Removing the white woolen shawl from his shoulders, he covered the top part of the body and turned back to Frances.

"After my cousin came upon the body of the American, he left the sheep with his dog and started

down the mountain to notify the police in the village. When he came to the break in the canyon where we stopped to look at the sea, he heard the distant bray of a donkey. He looked down and saw two men riding the trail far down the mountainside. It was quite far, but he said he could tell by the way they rode their donkeys that they were foreigners.

"As you know, this is not the tourist season, so there are very few foreigners hereabouts. Outside of the Russian crews that load bauxite into the ships near the village and your American friends, there are no foreigners here."

Frances raised her eyebrows. "Russian crews? Bauxite? Please tell me more. Why would they have Russians loading bauxite into ships?"

He made a contemptuous gesture. "The Greek owners of bauxite mines in this area sell all of their ore to the Russians. The Russians will not allow anyone aboard their ships, so the crews do the loading. There are always sailors on shore leave who go sightseeing in the mountains. Another cousin of mine, who works in the mines, says that Russian engineers often stay in a house near the loading platforms, provided by the mine owners, between the visits of the ships."

Frances Ivy nodded thoughtfully. "It's getting late," she said. "We had better tell the police about your cousin's death."

When they reached the outskirts of the village the shepherd reined in his diminutive mount and waited for Frances.

"You may rest assured," he said, as she came along-side, "I will not betray your confidence. I think it would be well if I visit the police alone. They will ask many questions and I know you are anxious to return to the house of your friends. I will be at the coffeeshop tomorrow, if you want me."

The redhead handed him the two-hundred drachma fee upon which they had agreed.

"I have a better idea. Come to my friends' villa at seven tomorrow morning. You can tell your friends that I have engaged you as a guide for the duration of my stay in Petris. I have a feeling I will need your services in more ways than one."

They rode to the waterfront together, where the old man lifted his woolen cap and pointed to the Cronins' villa in the distance.

Frances said, "Ask for Miss Frances Ivy when you come to the house."

"I feel as though we had known each other for a long time," he said, "and we are only now exchanging names. My name is Janus Scalesteri."

She leaned over and offered her hand. "We have an appointment at seven."

As she prodded her tiny mount into action she saw three figures

emerge from the Cronins' waterfront villa. Bruce and Lisa were easily recognizable. It was not until she was within a block of the advancing figures that she recognized Adolf Gruber as the third member of the trio.

"Jimmy hasn't shown up," Bruce called. "Did you find out anything?"

Lisa stared with distended eyes as Frances Ivy told of the second gruesome discovery on the mountain. Bruce swore softly. "We've checked every building," he said, "even had the local police helping us search for Jimmy. The chief speaks English fairly well. Everyone he questioned swears that Jimmy wasn't seen by anyone in the village today."

Frances dismounted and turned the donkey over to Adolf. She addressed the handyman. "Did your wife describe the woman she saw with Mr. Young at the back gate?"

He shook his head. "Hilda says all of the village girls look alike to her from a distance, especially since they all wear black from head to foot. The only thing she saw clearly was that the girl wore a black shawl over her head."

"What makes Hilda so sure that it was a girl and not an older woman she saw?"

Adolf smiled slightly. "The young ladies in the village are always after Mr. Young."

Bruce said, "Woman or girl, Jimmy was decoyed into leaving

the house. He did not wander away for a romantic tryst. I'd stake my life on that."

Lisa winced and clutched her husband's arm protectively. "I'm afraid that's exactly what you are doing, my love—staking your life."

III

PETRIS'S chief of police awakened Bruce Cronin the following morning at daybreak to inform him that he had deputized men from the village to comb the surrounding mountains for any trace of his assistant and to say that one of his own staff was stationed within sighting distance of the rocky bier that had served as a last resting place for young Allen and the shepherd.

Lisa and Frances joined Bruce in the kitchen after the voluble official departed.

"I'll whip up some eggs and bacon," Lisa said. "Hilda and Adolf put in a long enough day without

awakening them at this ungodly hour."

Frances Ivy waited until they had downed their first cup of coffee before handing Bruce the small, torn scrap of paper and the dark gray bit of cloth she had extracted from the dead shepherd's hand.

Bruce examined them curiously. "The writing is Russian," said the redhead. "I'm fairly proficient in that language. The ink is smeared, but two words are legible. They are 'satellite' and 'dangerous'. The cloth is a woolen suit material. The inference, of course, is that the shepherd came to grips with his assailant and tore the cloth and the paper from a pocket of his coat."

Lisa's eyes mirrored her horror. "So that's the answer. This satellite tracking station is worrying the Soviets and they've decided to eliminate it and the men who operate it."

Bruce shook his head. "That's pretty far-fetched, honey. Anyhow, I don't believe there are any Russians within miles of this confounded place."

Frances told them of the Russian sailors and engineers her elderly guide had mentioned as being in the bauxite mining area. She scanned her host's countenance. "I know your work is in strictest security and you can't discuss it, Bruce, but have you any reason to believe that the reds might be alarmed enough about your activities to liquidate you and your men?"

Cronin looked uncomfortable. "Killing us off wouldn't accomplish anything. We would be replaced and the work would go on."

Frances said, "Is it possible that the Russians are planning some sort of satellite maneuver around this area in the near future and could pull it off between the time they eliminated you and your men and the time it would take to bring in a new staff?"

Bruce sighed. "There have been hints that the Soviets are designing a giant satellite capable of dropping manned craft near our missile installations. But the Russians are a long way off from perfecting anything powerful and diversified enough for such a maneuver."

He shrugged. "If they did have that type of satellite, this would be the ideal spot to stage a rehearsal for such an attack, but the chances are a thousand to one against it." He handed her the torn cloth and the smudged piece of paper.

"To be perfectly honest with you, Frances," he said, "it's possible that Kevin and Jimmy might have run afoul of some jealous Greek husband. These hinterlanders are the soul of kindness unless you fool with their women. Every day you see stories in the Athens newspapers about rural Greek husbands killing their wives' boyfriends. I warned both of the youngsters, but I'm afraid they've been diddling most of the pretty

girls in the village, married and unmarried."

"Oh sure," Lisa said. "And I suppose the jealous Greek husband built a rock bier in the shape of a rocket platform and had a note in his pocket with the Russian word for 'satellite' written on it."

A knock on the kitchen window interrupted her. Frances's guide of the day before stood outside the window. She beckoned to the man outside the window.

"Let him in the back gate, Bruce. I'm sure he'd like a cup of coffee."

A few moments later, the dignified old gentleman was smiling at them over a steaming cup of Turkish coffee. Bruce and Lisa were immediately captivated by the shepherd's courtly manners. His excellent command of English proved an agreeable surprise. He explained modestly that he had put several years of military service with the British Armed Services.

As the old fellow munched on Hilda's spice cookies, Frances plied him with questions.

"I am quite curious about one phase of village life," she said. "The manager of the bank in Itea told me that it was impossible to persuade the people in this province to deposit money in his bank. According to him, less than five percent of the residents of Petris have bank accounts. He says they all bury gold in their houses. Is that true?"

The shepherd's eyes narrowed. "It is true. Most of the Greeks in the rural districts feel the same way about putting their money in banks. We have had many wars in Greece and each time there is a war, the currency has become worthless, while gold has increased in value."

Lisa said, "I should think the villagers would be afraid to leave their houses for fear someone would steal their gold."

"No one in Petris would dream of stealing gold from a neighbor," the shepherd said. "Even if they did, they would be caught. This is a small village and no one can make a move without being observed. Anyhow, there is not enough gold in the entire village to make theft worthwhile."

Janus Scalesteri sighed as he put down his cup. "This was not so before the German occupation. Petris was Greece's leading seaport and shipbuilding center during the days of sailing vessels. Many of our residents were rich by Greek standards."

The old shepherd cast a shrewd glance at Frances Ivy. "Your banker friend probably told you what happened to our gold during World War Two. The Nazis dropped soldiers in parachutes and took our village so quickly that no one had a chance to hide our gold in the mountains as we and our ancestors have done for centuries. Between the gold that was brought here from Athens by relatives for safekeeping during the early stages

of the German invasion and the gold inherited by descendants of sea captains and shipbuilders, there must have been over a million dollars in coins confiscated by the Nazis."

Scalesteri shrugged. "The gold did not help the German army. The confiscated coins were placed in a chest and deposited in the village's sole warehouse with a half dozen soldiers guarding it. Next morning, the gold and the guards had disappeared. The bodies of the guards were never found, but the commandant felt sure they had been murdered. He threatened to kill one male villager a day until the gold was returned. Fortunately, the officer in charge was transferred to another post and the executions stopped after the third day."

Lisa looked at him wide-eyed. "What happened to the gold? Does anyone know?"

The old man nodded. "I can only guess. Guerillas were in and out of the village all the time. Many of them hid in the homes of relatives when they were not in the mountains. They often cut the throats of Nazi soldiers on dark nights. The Germans had no way of identifying them. Obviously none of the villagers would turn them in. A band of guerillas could have exterminated the guards and stolen the gold. If they did so, none of the money ever found its way back to Petris. We are all equally poor."

He was lost in thought for a few moments. "I think that the theft and the murders of the Nazi guards might have been done by Italian soldiers. Many of the murders of German soldiers in Greece were blamed on guerillas, when they were actually done by gangsters among the Italian occupation forces."

Frances said, "You said that the villagers watch every move made by their neighbors and by strangers. Why is it that no one in the village has seen Mr. Young and the girl he was with when he left this house?"

Scalesteri's eyes were steady as they met hers. "Mr. Young may have left here with a girl, but it definitely was not a girl from this village. I have ways of finding out." He paused and looked at the redhead uncertainly. "I don't wish to give offense, but every man in this village, including myself, knows which girls have been friendly with both Mr. Young and Mr. Allen. Please take my word for it. None of these young women were with Mr. Young yesterday."

"Could either of them have been harmed by jealous boy-friends?" Frances asked.

The old shepherd smiled sardonically.

"Please do not think me indelicate, but most of the village youth and a number of men who came to Petris for amusement shared all of the young Americans'

local girl-friends. They are not the type to arouse jealousy."

The front doorbell rang insistently.

Bruce rose from the table. Before he could leave the room they heard Hilda's voice and a masculine murmur. A few moments later, she appeared at the kitchen door.

"There are two men at the door. They say they are from the bauxite mines across the bay and wish to speak to Mr. Cronin."

Bruce turned to the redhead with raised eyebrows. "Odd coincidence. We've never had any visitors before except the local dignitaries and the tradespeople. I'd like to have you with me when I speak to them. Will you show them into the living room, Hilda?"

The two men were standing as Frances and Bruce entered. The taller of the two, a burly giant with a thatch of stubby blond hair, was the first to speak.

"My name is Stefani Gregor. This is Josef Bolsich. We are engineers from the Parnassis bauxite mine. We decided to call on you when we heard of the death of one of your associates and the disappearance of another. One of our associates also has been mysteriously missing for the past four days. We have checked with everyone, including his wife in Itea. No one has seen him since he came to Petris on the ferryboat."

He paused and exchanged

glances with his companion. "Two boys, who work on the ferryboat, told us they saw Costa get off the boat and walk down the waterfront toward this house."

Bruce lowered the hand he had extended toward the speaker. "What do you mean, he was walking toward this house? There are a half-dozen stores and twenty houses between the ferryslip and this house. And who is Costa?"

The big man's face froze into immobility. "Costa Scarimbas is the name of the missing engineer. There is no reason to be impolite. The two boys who saw him last said he was walking toward this house. I was simply repeating their words."

Josef Bolsich broke in. "We did not come here to quarrel with you, Mr. Cronin. I assume from your anger that Costa did come here. Perhaps you will tell us why."

Bruce grinned suddenly. "If you must know, gentlemen, your friend, Mr. Scarimbas, came here to sell me Russian military secrets. I have him chained in the basement. Every thirty minutes or so I go downstairs and beat him over the head with a rubber hose. So far, he has told me plenty."

The little man's face was suffused with color. "I do not consider your remarks amusing, Mr. Cronin," he said through tightened lips. "Come, Stefani. We will have to use other methods."

Frances, who had been observing the pair in silence, spoke to the larger of the visitors as he started for the door.

"Perhaps you will tell us why your missing associate would want to come to this house. Are you under the impression that Mr. Cronin or any of his house guests are interested in bauxite mining?"

"You choose to jest, young lady," said the big man. "We are fully aware of the nature of Mr. Cronin's activities in Petris."

They left. They did not look back.

IV

FRANCES IVY and the shepherd sat erect on wooden chairs in the stone hut's single room and nibbled on a sweet between sips of a syrupy brandy. Their hostess looked at them expectantly. The serving of cordial and sweets was in accordance with Greek custom. Mrs. Scarimbas had insisted that the redheaded American girl and Janus Scalesteri partake of both before they explain their visit.

Frances soon came to the point. "We are here to help locate your husband, Mrs. Scarimbas. Also to discover the whereabouts of an American friend. Both were last seen across the bay in the village of Petris. I am hoping you can help us in our search."

Mrs. Scarimbas frowned. "How can I help? Neither I nor any of my family or my friends have seen or heard from Costa since he left the bauxite mines."

Frances Ivy's voice was placating. "Perhaps we can find a clue to your husband's whereabouts by recalling some of his conversations with you. Did Mr. Scarimbas, by any chance, mention who it was that he intended to see in Petris?"

"Costa did not talk to me before he went to Petris. The only time he comes home is on weekends."

"Did your husband ever mention any particular friends or acquaintances in the village of Petris?"

Their hostess flushed. "Costa would not be inclined to mention the kind of friends he and the other miners have in Petris. The girls in

that village have a reputation for being as immoral as they are pretty."

"Did you notice anything unusual about your husband's actions in recent weeks? Did he seem excited or more absent-minded than usual?"

The woman smiled sadly. "Costa is always excited. Life is a glorious adventure to my husband. He still lives in the days when he led a band of guerillas against the Nazis. He also is the world's biggest liar. He even makes up crazy stories about the Russian engineers who live in a separate house at the mines."

Her laughter was a blend of contempt and pity. "One night, Costa pointed toward a bright star in the heavens and said that he was the only Greek in the mines who knew that the Russian engineers were sending messages to this star and receiving answers."

The toil-worn features softened. "My husband lives in a world of his own making. I cannot really hate him. He is a child in a man's body. I hope no harm has come to him."

Mrs. Scarimbas gestured toward the threadbare furnishings in the room. "My poor wild Costa! He told me on his last weekend at home that he was going to take us away from this hovel and move into a mansion in Crete, the island of his birth. I asked him if he hoped to do these grand things on what is left of his earnings at the mine, after he squanders most of it on women."

Frances asked softly, "What did he answer?"

Mrs. Scarimbas seemed startled at the question. "Now that I think back, his answer was strange. He said he expected to collect a large sum of money. I asked him what he meant and he said for me to forget what he had said or it might prove dangerous for all of us."

The redhead nodded to the shepherd. They rose to take their departure. "We will notify you immediately," she said, "if we learn anything about your husband, Mrs. Scarimbas. Should he contact you, I would appreciate your sending me a message."

Bruce and Lisa had nothing new to report when they met the redhead and the shepherd at the dock in Petris. Frances Ivy relayed the conversation with the missing miner's wife. Bruce's eyes narrowed when she mentioned Costa's remark about the Russians communicating with the star and his warning to his wife.

"They probably killed him when he tried to blackmail them," Bruce said. "That explains Costa's disappearance." He halted in his tracks. "Or does it? If the Russians bumped off Costa, why did they come barging into our place?"

Lisa said, "Probably their devious way of letting you know that they already have disposed of three men who tried to interfere with

their plans and wouldn't hesitate to add you to the list. What worries me is that they may think this Costa character sold you the information before they knocked him off. That would make you a must on their liquidation list."

"That does it," said Bruce. "This place is too dangerous. I want you and Frances to go back to Itea on the ferry's return trip. You can hire a taxi to take you from Itea to Delphi. Check in at the Vouzas Hotel tonight and continue on to Athens in the morning."

He turned to the redhead. "You know whom to contact in Athens. Tell the big brass the whole story and stress the need for speedy reinforcements."

Frances shook her head. "Sorry, Bruce. I'm staying."

As Cronin started to speak, Frances held up a restraining hand. "Give me forty-eight hours. If I don't have this situation under control by that time, I promise I will go to Athens and take Lisa with me."

Frances saw the uncertainty in his eyes. "You know I wouldn't risk Lisa's life, don't you?"

Bruce Cronin's shrug was resigned.

Frances Ivy dug into her purse. She touched the shepherd's arm.

"I need your assistance, my friend. Please take this money. First, you must buy a lantern and make sure it has plenty of oil. Then, rent a rowboat. Try to get a large, sturdy one. Cushion the oars with cloth so they will move noiselessly in the oarlocks. Meet me at the rocky point below Mr. and Mrs. Cronin's house at eight o'clock tonight and make sure no one sees you close enough to recognize you while you are waiting for me."

Lisa said, "Why rent a boat, Frances? We've got a good seaworthy skiff. The boys use it for fishing."

"Anyone walking along the waterfront would notice it if your boat was missing," said the redhead. "Mr. Scalesteri and I are going to try very hard to keep our mission secret. Thanks just the same, honey."

The three stood for a moment and watched the ramrod-straight old man walk away before Frances broke the silence.

"I'll excuse myself shortly after dinner," she said. "While you two play a hand or two of gin-rummy over an after-dinner brandy and the help are tidying up, I'll slip out of my bedroom window and meet Mr. Scalesteri at the point."

V

BRUCE CRONIN WAS at the breakfast table next morning when Frances Ivy walked in. He whistled as his eyes roamed over the scantily attired figure.

She smiled and placed a finger to her lips. "The less we talk right now, the better. A careless word to

someone outside this house might spoil my plans."

"You can speak freely," Bruce said. "I'm itching to know what happened. First, let me get you some coffee or orange juice or something."

"Coffee is fine, thanks. Pour out another cup, Bruce. I see Mr. Scalesteri coming." She paused. "I can't tell you anything right now, Bruce. I promise, you'll be the first to know when I think it's safe to talk."

"Okay, honey, I'll push off. And let you and your boy friend whisper sweet nothings over your coffee."

Bruce grinned cheerfully as he left the room.

Frances waited until her elderly guest had downed his second cup of coffee before walking to the door and making sure no one was within earshot.

"Please follow the instructions I gave you very carefully, Mr. Scalesteri. Remember one thing in particular. No matter what you see, you and your men are not to come ashore until the police have come and gone with their prisoners. You know what to do, then."

His brow furrowed into leathery lines. "Suppose I see that you are in danger. Surely—"

She interrupted him. "Under no circumstances must you come ashore until the police and their prisoners have left."

His shrug was resigned. "You can depend on me and my men. They are trusted friends."

She saw him to the front door before stretching out under the sun on the terrace. From her vantage point she could see most of the waterfront.

Lisa joined her a little later, wearing a brief red bikini. Looking out of the window of his workroom, Bruce decided that his brunette wife in red and their redheaded guest in blue formed a delightful contrast. A few moments later, he was telling them so as he stretched out beside them on a deck chair.

Lisa winked at Frances. "Okay, peeping Tom. If you're hanging around expecting us to take off as much as Hilda did, you're wasting your time."

Bruce's eyes widened and he glanced at his watch.

"Speaking of our bare bather, is that Hilda I see swimming out to the island? I thought she did her strip act every day at the same time. I distinctly remember your telling me not to go near her private domain between one and three."

"She's getting her sunshine early," his wife said. "I'm sending her over to Itea, this afternoon, for some chickens. I don't want to inflict the local hens on Frances while she's here. They're as tough as shoe leather, probably from scrambling around these rocks looking for enough to eat."

They sat in silence as the swim-

mer rounded the docky tip of the island. Frances looked toward the garden and saw Adolf walking out of the gate with a basket over his arm.

"I see your hired man is doing his marketing early," she said idly.

Lisa followed her gaze. "That's the Germans for you. They're like machines. Adolf is so used to doing the marketing when Hilda takes her daily swim that he automatically dashes for the village when he sees her hit the water."

Frances Ivy shaded her eyes and pointed out to sea.

Bruce followed her gaze. "Hilda is swimming back," he said. "Wonder what happened. Looks like she is in a terrific hurry."

Lisa frowned. "She really is in a hurry. Let's go down to the stone steps and meet her when she comes ashore. Wonder what bugged her."

Bruce helped the swimmer onto the step. The trio looked at Hilda in surprise. Her eyes were distended and her face was dun-colored under the deep tan as she climbed out of the water.

"What on earth is the matter?" said Lisa. "You look as though you had seen a ghost."

Hilda made an obvious effort to control herself. Her color returned to normal and she made a rueful grimace. "I'm being very silly. It was only an octopus, but it was so large. It seemed about to reach for me."

Frances's eyes were quizzical as they roamed over the sturdy body. A smile quirked her lips as she thought of the enormous squids that little boys caught with bare hands and tugged out of the sea throughout all Greece. This Amazon looked to be more than a match for any octopus she might encounter in these waters.

Hilda gave them a pallid smile and padded off toward the servants' wing.

Lisa pinched Bruce's arm. "Well, dear, you've learned one thing. You're not as obnoxious as an octopus. Let's get back to our basking, Frances."

"You go back with Bruce, dear," said the redhead. "I'm going to swim out to the island. Don't look so disturbed, honey. I can handle any octopus alive. Anyhow, I've got what it takes to repel any and all dangers in this waterproof bag."

She pointed to the bag she was fastening around her slim waist and dove off the steps before Lisa could reply. The couple on the steps saw her wave just before disappearing around the tip of the island.

VI

THE SEAWARD SIDE of the island was dark and forbidding. The slate-colored stone that rose in tiers from the waterline was honey-combed with countless caves. Frances Ivy pulled herself out of the sea at the only break in the formidable facade and rested on the huge flat

rock that obviously served as Hilda's sun-bathing perch.

After a moment, she picked her way through the jagged rocks toward a flickering light that illuminated the entrance of one of the lower caves. Frances grinned as she noted the eerie glow. She could well understand Hilda's trepidation.

Opening the bag at her waist, she withdrew a pencil-thin steel blade. She inserted the blade into a cloth sheath that had been sewed into the back of her bikini pants and entered the cave.

Once inside the cave, she hid the oilskin bag behind a rock and examined the sand that she and the shepherd had carefully spread on the damp stone floor for any sign of footprints. She saw with satisfaction that no one had entered the grotto since the previous night.

Frances heard the sound of men's voices outside and realized that she had miscalculated the speed of her adversaries' reaction. Two men wearing swim-trunks entered with drawn pistols.

"You can relax, gentlemen. There's no one here except a nosey woman. I just had to find out what caused this flickering light."

The larger of the two men said, "You were very foolish to come back here alone after baiting the trap."

He beckoned to the smaller man. "Go up to the cave and bring enough rope to tie her wrists while I keep her covered."

As they listened to the man's retreating steps the man with the gun said, "I don't want to kill you, but I will, if you make any attempt to escape. You know too much to be turned loose now. If you are sensible, you will not resist. Some one will find you later in the day. You are in no physical danger unless you try foolish heroics."

She looked at the man curiously. "Why did you kill Kevin Allen?"

He heaved a deep sigh. "My associate killed him accidentally. He caught the young man prying and tried to subdue him. Mr. Allen was too powerful. My friend had to stab him in the throat to keep from being throttled."

"And the shepherd?"

He shrugged. "He had to be liquidated. He told his village cronies that he saw us after we placed the body on the rocks."

"And, of course, you took Mr. Allen's body into the mountains to make it look as though he had been killed a great distance from this island. The rocket-shaped bier of stones and the torn paper with the scribbling in Russian was for Mr. Cronin's benefit. How about Jimmy Young?"

"He is hidden away in our cave. You will join him in a few moments. Sorry it had to turn out this way for you, but the stakes are too great to risk turning you loose."

The return of the man with the rope interrupted the discourse. Frances stood quietly while he be-

gan to tie her wrists. The man with the gun said, "This woman is a trained agent. We cannot afford to take chances with her. When we get her to the cave you must tie her ankles together, then latch the two ropes together in back as you did with the American."

Frances stifled a sigh of relief and breathed a prayer of thanksgiving. The pencil-thin cloth scabbard her dressmaker had sewn into her bikini pants was back where nature's curves gave it a natural concealment. She had practiced extracting the razor-sharp blade from the scabbard for hours on end under almost every conceivable handicap. This would be the first time she had been forced to put that practice to a test.

The little man gagged her with a large bandanna, gave a final tug to the knots that encircled the wrists at her back and snickered.

"Why tie her? I don't mind carrying this little beauty. If she is as dangerous as you say, she may give us the slip."

The big fellow made an impatient sound. "This is not time for jokes. You could not climb the treacherous rocks to the cave with her on your back. Come, let us go."

The ascent over the rugged ledges was as tricky as the big man had predicted. Frances Ivy lost her footing several times. The too willing hands of the smaller of her captors helped her avoid some nasty falls. Their destination turned out to be the tiny entrance of a cave at the topmost tier of rock.

She controlled a desire to turn and look out to sea as the little man motioned for her to get down on her knees and crawl inside. The tall man, who had preceded her, directed the beam of a flashlight into the darkness and she saw just about what she had expected. The cave itself was huge. The rays revealed the bound and gagged figure of a man in swim trunks lying on a straw mat.

A two-way radio set, resting on a bulky looking object, caught her attention.

While the smaller of her captors was binding her ankles and blindfolding her, the large man flipped a switch on the transmitter and uttered a series of numbers in Greek that sounded like code signals. The voice that answered in the same language repeated the numbers.

The man with the rope straightened up with a satisfied grunt. The big fellow said: "This is your department. Tell him that we've had to change our plans. We want the plane ready as soon as possible, instead of tonight as we originally planned. If he sends the launch immediately, we can load up and get out of here before the girl's friends get worried and come after her."

Frances heard the click of the switch as he signed off.

"The launch will be here in about two hours," the little man

said. "Lucas is sending four men to carry our other things down to the boat."

The redhead heard the larger man make an impatient sound. "It seems to me that we are getting too many outsiders involved in our project. One man would have been sufficient. We can assist with the loading."

His companion made soothing noises. "Don't worry. None of the men will know what they are moving. Even Lucas does not know. All he knows is that we have promised him ten thousand dollars in gold when his plane touches down. The men who move us are no problem. We cannot leave this country with our type of luggage, through official channels."

The larger man said, "Very well. Let us carry some of our lighter things down to the water's edge. That will, at least, save time."

Frances Ivy, who had wriggled into a position which she estimated would leave her facing her captors, was using the concealed blade from her bikini. She waited until she heard their voices fade before exerting the final pressure on the frayed ropes.

With her arms freed, it took only a few seconds to rip through her ankle bonds. She hurried to the prostrate form and was glad to note, as she removed the blindfold, that his eyes were open and alert. Before removing the gag she placed a precautionary finger over the man's lips. The head nodded in understanding.

A few quick slashes and Frances was helping Jimmy Young restore circulation to numbed limbs. She kept her voice down.

"We must get out of here quickly. It would be impossible to reach the sea on this side without being observed. I noticed that we are at the topmost level of the rock

ledges. We will be exposed for only a moment when we step outside. During that moment, you must reach up and pull yourself to the summit, then reach down for me."

Young nodded and they crawled wordlessly through the cave's tiny entrance. A quick look showed the two men still clambering down the rocks. Jimmy found that even his six feet two inches and long arms couldn't quite make the top. He jumped. A moment later Frances was on the summit beside him. They crouched behind the concealing ledge and peered down. Their erstwhile captors were depositing their burdens on the flat rock that served as Hilda's sun-perch.

Frances tugged at Jimmy's arm. The descent seemed interminable

to both, but actually took only a few moments. They slipped into the water and struck out strongly for shore.

VII

AFTER FRANCES contacted the chief, it took less than ten minutes for the village's police force of three, plus a hastily commandeered posse of four hard-eyed fishermen to get under way in a gasoline launch.

The chief was adamant in his refusal to allow any of the Americans to accompany them.

Bruce and Lisa, Jimmy and Frances stood on the stone steps and watched the boat disappear around the island's craggy tip.

Bruce turned to Frances. "Now, will you tell me what the score is? How did you know Jimmy would be stashed away in a cave on the island?"

Jimmy said, "Yes, young lady, and perhaps you can explain why I was conked on the head and trussed up like a turkey in that cave."

Bruce looked at him reprovingly. "I specially asked you to stick around until we got back from the ferry, Jimmy. Served you damned well right."

"Hell's bells, Bruce. All I intended to do was take a quick dip while you were away. While I was splashing around in the sea, in front of the house, I saw someone swimming toward the island. Thinking it might be Hilda, I decided to have a look."

He grinned sheepishly. "When I got around to the other side there was no sign of Hilda on that flat rock you described. I was about to swim back when I saw someone disappear into a cave, high up on the rocks. Still thinking it was the fair Hilda, I climbed up, poked my head into the cave—and someone knocked me cold."

Bruce stared at him. "But Hilda said she saw you walk out the back gate with one of the village girls."

Jimmy snickered. "Hilda has seen me sneak out the back gate with a dame so often she must have gotten her dates mixed. What I did —" He broke off suddenly at the sound of distant shooting.

They all peered toward the island. The shots continued sporadically. After a period of silence, they saw the police launch rounding the tip of the island and heading toward the steps. As the boat drew nearer, Frances saw the smaller of her abductors sitting in the bow, with his wrists tied together. When the boat bumped against the stone step they could all see the figure of a big man prone in the bottom.

No one in the group realized that Hilda had rushed down from the house and joined them until they heard her sobbing.

Bruce turned to Frances Ivy, his face mirroring his amazement, as Hilda threw her arms around the

blood-stained man the police had helped ashore.

"This is fantastic," Cronin said. "How in the world did Adolf get mixed up in this business?"

The redhead waited until the chief of police had gently disengaged Hilda's arms and gestured for his men to take Adolf and the trussed little man away before she spoke.

"It's a long story, Bruce. It actually starts way back during World War Two, when Adolf was a Nazi soldier, stationed in this village."

Bruce goggled at her. "What's Adolf and World War Two got to do with the Soviet satellite mission and all this crazy, mixed-up killing and kidnaping?"

Frances took Lisa's arm. "Let's get settled on the terrace. I'll try to explain before the chief of police comes back with a lot of questions he would like to have answered.

"First of all," she said, "You must be told that the Soviet satellite mission was not involved in any of this, except indirectly. When the two Russians from the bauxite mines came here they actually thought you might have had something to do with the disappearance of Costa Scarimbas. Obviously, they suspected that he had been spying on them before he vanished. They thought he might have come here to sell you information about their satellite activities."

"But I still don't see—," Bruce began.

His dream has spread all over the World

The suffering Henri Dunant saw on the battlefields of Europe moved him not to tears but to action. In 1863, heeding his plea, 16 nations, along with welfare and learned societies, founded the first international organization for relief of war victims. Its symbol—a red cross.

This year—a full century later—that same symbol of hope is found throughout the world. Wherever help is needed, Red Cross is . . .

Always there... with your help RED CROSS

Frances Ivy held up a detaining hand. "I'll start by telling you that the trussed-up little man who was carried away with Adolf is the miss-

ing bauxite miner, Costa Scarimbas. I learned from Costa's wife that he was head of a guerilla band during World War Two. As you recall, Adolf said he was stationed in this very village when he deserted from the German army.

"When Costa was last seen heading toward this house, I was convinced he was on the track of the gold that was confiscated from the villagers and later stolen from the Nazis. I decided that the gold and not Adolf's tender sensibilities probably was responsible for his desertion from the German army.

"Mr. Scalesteri told us that there was liaison between certain of the villagers and the guerillas. Costa and some of his men probably were in Petris when the Nazis parachuted in. They could have watched the gold being taken into the warehouse and had ample opportunity to gauge the numerical strength of the military guard that the commandant stationed there. It seems logical that they would have had every chance to see the faces of the guards and remember them. When over a million dollars in gold disappears one is not apt to forget any detail.

"Now, to bring the story to date, Costa's wife said that he often came to Petris to spend money on the girls and drink. Adolf was around the village often, doing the shopping. Costa might easily have recognized him as one of the German guards at the warehouse. We must assume that he did so and made a deal to help Adolf get the hidden gold out of the country. Actually, Adolf needed just that kind of local help to take the gold out of Greece."

Frances Ivy sighed. "As for Adolf's fellow guards at the warehouse, I imagine that their skeletons are mouldering in one of the hundreds of caves on that island. The fact that he is the only one of them to show up in the village since the war, indicates that he bumped off his companions."

She turned to Lisa. "I thought it odd that an attractive couple like Hilda and Adolf would leave a luxury hotel in Austria to do household chores in this primitive village. They realized, of course, that you and Bruce furnished a heaven-sent opportunity for Adolf to come back here and try to get the gold out of the country, without atracting undue attention."

Jimmy Young, who had been listening, wide-eyed, interrupted her.

"I'll bet the gold is stashed away in the very cave they used as our prison. That's what they were arranging to move by launch and plane when we heard them using the transmitter. That two-way set probably is a hangover from Costa's guerilla warfare days and the plane probably belongs to one of his ex-war-buddies."

"Right you are," said Frances. "Incidentally, my first inkling as to

the whereabouts of the gold stemmed from Hilda's daily swims to the island and the coy act about sunbathing in the nude to keep everyone away as much as possible until they could arrange to move the gold. She made her mistake when she saw you leave with one of the village girls. After the villagers exploded that story, I decided to go into action.

"Last night, my shepherd friend and I placed a lighted lantern in a cave close to Hilda's sunbathing rock. I figured she would see the light, become alarmed over the safety of the gold and inform Adolf. She did just that. Adolf and his accomplice swallowed the bait and led me to the cave where you and the gold were hidden."

Jimmy Young broke in again. His voice was electric with excitement.

"We heard Scarimbas ask someone to come to the island and pick them up in a launch. I didn't see the police bring back anything that looked like a chest full of gold coins. The men contacted by Scarimbas probably are carting off the gold, this very minute. Hadn't we better inform the police?"

Frances Ivy shook her head. "I see no need to inform the police. If they get into the act the gold will be tied up in litigation for years. They've got the men who were responsible for two murders and a kidnaping. Let them think ransom might have been the reason for all this hullabaloo. I can assure you, Adolf and Costa won't mention the gold. They will cling to the hope that they can get to it after they get out of jail."

"Yes, but the men in the launch?" Jimmy Young said. "Do you want them to have the gold?"

The redhead smiled. "Don't worry about the men in the launch. The gold is in the hands of the real owners, the people of this village. My good friend Mr. Scalesteri and his cronies removed it from the cave immediately after the police left with their prisoners."

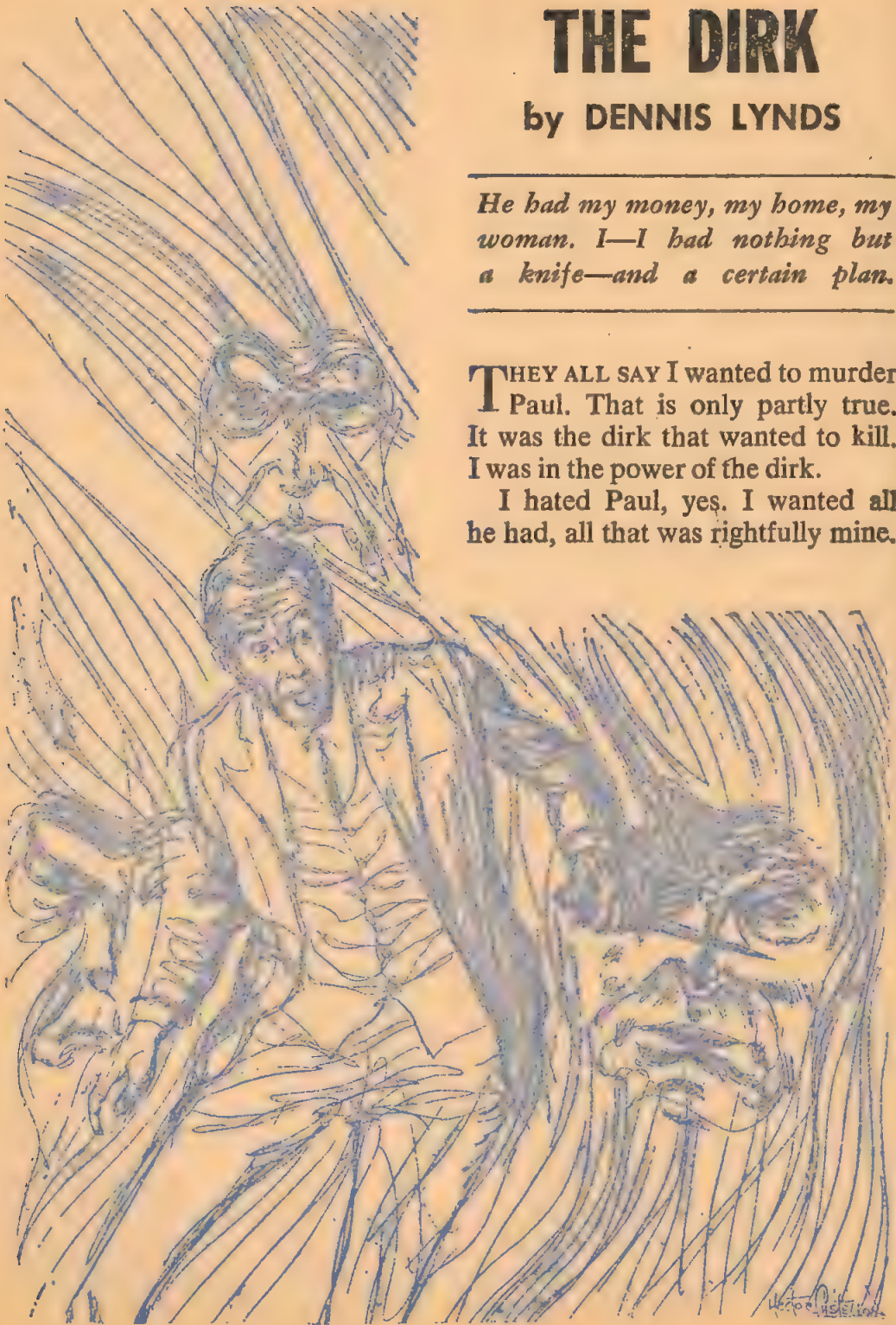
Frances Bascom Ivy met Bruce's eyes. "You weren't altogether correct in saying that my elderly boyfriend and I wanted to whisper sweet nothings over our coffee, but we did do some constructive whispering. After you left, we put the final touches to this million dollar caper."

A NEW COMPLETE SOLO AND ILLYA NOVEL NEXT MONTH

THE DIRK

by DENNIS LYNDS

He had my money, my home, my woman. I—I had nothing but a knife—and a certain plan.



THEY ALL SAY I wanted to murder Paul. That is only partly true. It was the dirk that wanted to kill. I was in the power of the dirk.

I hated Paul, yes. I wanted all he had, all that was rightfully mine.

But it was the dirk that made me think of murder.

It is a beautiful thing, the long, sharp glittering knife. When I saw it there in the shop window of the small village outside Edinburgh it seemed to reach out to me, to draw me to it. I had to have it.

The polished leather sheath was black, bound top and bottom with carved silver. It gleamed in the shop window. It seemed to speak to me. I know now that it spoke of death.

We were both Scots, Paul and I. As I stood in the thin mist of that Scottish village, I saw in my mind the strong men who had worn that dirk, the fierce Scots warriors who were my ancestors.

They were hard men, strong. They took what they wanted, whether it was an enemy's life or a brother's woman. On that empty street I heard their savage shouts. I saw them draw their *claymores* from their backs and rush upon the enemy, brandishing the heavy, basket-hilted swords.

Strong men who claimed their own, and I had come to Scotland to think of how I could claim what was mine.

I had wanted time, and isolation, to think of just how I could take all that Paul had taken from me. I admit that. Half of what Paul had was mine by right. I had been cheated, my birthright stolen by my brother.

Paul and I were not really brothers, although we have the same name, MacPherson. When I was left an orphan by the war, Paul's father, old James MacPherson, brought me to America and his estate in Utica, New York. Paul and I are really only distant cousins.

Still, I called old James MacPherson my father, just as Paul did. The old man did not, however, legally adopt me, and Paul saw fit to use that legal loophole. When old James died, a year ago, it all went to Paul. The estate, the factory in Utica, and the money, except for my small trust fund. And with all that, Paul took Melanie, too.

At first I wanted only my fair half—and Melanie. But as I lived on with them in the big house, I came to want it all. I had been injured, and, as months passed, I knew I had been cheated—purposely. Old James had meant to leave me half, I was sure of it. I had been cheated. And a strong man does not settle for a pittance when he has been treacherously injured.

No, I determined to have it all. The estate, the factory, the money, and Melanie. From the smiles, the warmth of my dear brother's wife toward me, I did not think that I would find it difficult to take Melanie.

For the rest, there would have to be planning. I was the plant manager at the factory, and there were ways to squeeze Paul out. I was

known in the industry; perhaps I could get financial aid and buy him out. First, of course, I would have to ruin him and the business.

You see? There was at first no thought of murder. I thought of plans for cheating Paul, yes, as he had cheated me, but I did not think of murder. That was the power of the dirk.

I soon found I could not think clearly in the big house. They were always there, Paul and Melanie. Always friendly. They were there, always loving to each other. I felt that my soul would scream in agony to watch them. No, I could not think carefully, coolly, as I had to.

Under Paul's eyes as I was, I could not begin to contact people who could help me. I needed time to study the figures I made of our production and our costs. So I told them, Paul and dear Melanie, that I wanted to return to my old home in Scotland for a visit. I told them that old James' death had shaken me more than I had realized, that I felt the need to return to my childhood home to regain my peace of mind.

"It made you think of your real parents," Paul said. "We understand, of course. Take all the time you need, Angus."

So they believed me. I went to Scotland. I talked to powerful financial men in the hope of securing their aid in taking over the factory. I considered selling some of our secrets to competitors in order to ruin Paul. I investigated the possibilities of a stock manipulation from abroad.

I thought of many schemes, but I did not think of murder until I saw the dirk gleaming there in the shop window. I know I had not thought of murder! It was the dirk. I know now that it was always the dirk!

When all my schemes seemed unworkable, I took a long walking trip in the Highlands. I wandered for weeks across the rocky and treeless moors of my native land. In the harsh and barren hills I drank in the aura of the ancient country.

I began to feel strong, almost reborn, the wild land a part of me again. I had to take back what was mine! It belonged to me, all of it. The world and all in it belongs to those strong enough to take it. As I walked I came to know the truth of that. And yet there was no way!

Then I saw the dirk.

The silver and polished leather of the sheath shined in the shop window. The bone handle was intricately carved with an image of wild boars. All at once, then, I had to have it. I know now that it, the dirk, was already luring me to murder.

I went into the shop and picked it up from the window. I held it. A beautiful thing. Its bone handle fitted my hand exactly. I drew the blade from the polished sheath. Almost eighteen inches long, the blade glinted dully in the dim in-

terior of the shop. Razor sharp, the blade was tapered on both edges and ended in a needle point. The upper edge was thick and serrated for skinning deer. In the center of the blade was the deep groove that allows the blood to flow from the wound so that the blade will not stick fast in its victim.

The shopkeeper, an old man, watched me as I handled the ancient weapon. A wizened old man, he seemed to stare into my face as if he recognized me.

"You find a pleasure in it, young man?" the old man said.

It was only later that I realized that the old man had no accent. Not a trace of the Scots in his voice, as if he existed somewhere beyond time and place. At the time I did not notice this strange fact. I was staring at the dirk in my hand. It seemed to send a wave of power through my arm.

"You are a Scot?" the old man said.

"Yes," I said. "My name is Angus MacPherson."

"Then you must know the legend," the old man said.

"No," I said, "I don't know the legend, I'm afraid."

But, strangely, I had the definite premonition that I *did*. Not *know*, exactly, but feel. The way I seemed to feel the power of the dirk course up my arm as I held it.

"A dirk becomes a part of any true Scot who holds it," the old man said. "That is the legend. A real dirk, one that has already tasted blood, becomes a part of a man if he is a real Scot. A dirk lengthens the arm of a man."

"Becomes a part of a man?" I said slowly.

"And he becomes part of the dirk. The man becomes like the dirk, and the dirk becomes like the man," the old man went on.

"Symbolically, of course," I said. "And true, in a way. When I hold it my arm is eighteen inches longer. That's all it means."

"Perhaps," the old man said.

I bought the dirk. The price was outrageous, but I had to have it. I think I knew the moment I saw it that I would buy it. It had a strange power over me, I know that now. At the time I simply complained of the price, but bought it.

Almost immediately after that I sailed for home. It was as if the dirk gave me all I wanted. As if I had come to Scotland only to find the dirk.

The voyage home was uneventful. The dirk lay packed at the bottom of my suitcase. When the ship docked I took an immediate train for Utica. Paul and Melanie met me at the station. They seemed genuinely glad to see me.

I'm sure I seemed equally glad to see them.

"Well, Angus, all ready to get back into harness?" Paul said. "You still look tired."

"Not a bit," I said. "I'm eager to get to work."

"We've missed you, Angus," Melanie said.

She is a beautiful woman, Melanie. I wanted her very much at that moment. There on the station platform she kissed me on the cheek. I made a note to remind her later of that sisterly kiss I found so galling. I think that my plan may have been forming then.

"The factory's going full blast," Paul said. "We need you. I can't run my end and yours."

"You're too modest, Paul," I said.

"Nonsense. You're the best plant manager in the business. In a few years, I'm going to give you a share. I think Dad would want that."

"Thank you, Paul," I said. I could hardly keep from smiling. A share was not what I had in mind. I would have nothing less than all.

It was then, while I was mentally vowing to have it all, that I thought of the dirk. Perhaps, I can see now, the dirk was thinking of me. I took it from my suitcase the moment we arrived at the big house. Paul scoffed heartily at the legend of the old man when I told him.

"You've got to watch we Scots. Angus," Paul said. "He was simply whetting your interest to up the price."

I disagreed, and handed him the beautiful weapon.

"Why, it's only an imitation, Angus," Paul said. "Look at that blade. They've put a cheap blade into a real hilt and sold it to you as the real thing."

"Whatever do you want with such an ugly knife?" Melanie said.

So typical of a stupid woman. She thought it ugly, my dirk. She looked at the polished leather, the gleaming silver, the razor sharp gleam of the blade, and thought it ugly. My dirk! The weapon of my ancestors! And I know it was at that precise moment that I knew the only way was to kill Paul. With the dirk! You see? It was the dirk all the time.

I returned to work in the factory and moved back into my wing of the big house. I placed the dirk prominently on my desk. For some months I did nothing but my work. I needed a plan. When I was free from the factory I took long walks in the fields and hills around Utica that were much like the wild land of Scotland itself.

Sometimes, as I walked, I seemed to hear the wild skirl of the bagpipes echoing through the hills.

It was a magnificent sound, the pipes skirling on the north wind. I began to see the kilted clansmen leaping through the hills after their hated enemies. Sometimes I carried the dirk at my waist, and it was like a living thing. It was part of me, and I was part of it. I was almost happy, almost ready to abandon my plans to get what was rightfully mine.

Then the sound of the pipes in the hills began to sound like a

giant sneering at me. When I imagined the clansmen out on the trail of plunder and power, I began to see them looking upon me with disdain. The dirk itself glowed on my desk at night as I lay in bed and seemed to mock me as the months passed.

Soon I could not sleep. I knew what I had to do. I had been robbed, cheated, dishonored, and the dirk would not stand for that. My resolve returned. Paul must die. And he had to die at the hands of the dirk itself.

But how?

I thought of a hunting accident. We were both fine hunters, Paul and I. The hunting season would soon be upon us. Every year many men died in hunting accidents. No matter what went wrong in such an accident, there was never a witness, and it would be my word against police suspicions if I did it carefully.

But how to have an accident with a dirk?

It never occurred to me to use any other weapon.

Then, too, I realized that I no longer wanted Melanie. She was a stupid woman. Her endless attentions to Paul, and to myself, her dear brother-in-law, were growing tiresome. I realized that I had wanted her only because Paul had her. With Paul dead I would not want her or need her. Except that without Melanie as my wife, Paul's death would bring me only part of what I wanted. All but the factory would go to Melanie.

The factory alone was not enough. It was clear that there was only one way to achieve my full rights—both Paul and Melanie must die. *Two* accidents were impossible. Then, again, any accident with the dirk would be hard to arrange. To kill Paul with the dirk would be sure to hint at murder. Well, then, it would be murder. Paul would be murdered. The murderer? Why, Melanie!

An old plan, yes. But I was always a man who believed that the old ways were the best. A tried and true plan. Melanie would kill Paul. The motive would be another man, a lover. The lover, of course, would be myself.

My former passion for Melanie was not unknown; there had been whispers. There would be a presumed quarrel over her attentions to me, and she would stab him in my study with *my* dirk. Perhaps she had been found there by Paul, who could say? A rage, and Paul would be dead. Perhaps Melanie would only go to prison, but that was enough.

She would deny all later, but, alas, I would have to admit our love. My attentions, my infatuation, would be obvious to all. A quick kiss or two in view of a passing maid in the big house. A warmer response on my part to Melanie's sisterly ministrations. A letter or two written by me and

carelessly overlooked by Melanie. With the evidence I intended to give the police, it would be enough.

The main evidence would be the dirk itself. Melanie's fingerprints on the bloody dirk in Paul's heart. On the dirk that everyone would see Melanie wearing the whole night of Paul's death—New Year's Eve!

The dirk whispered to me. I could not fail.

I duly created an aura of romance with Melanie. I worked hard at the factory to show that I was happy. I waited for New Year's Eve—the masquerade party! We MacPhersons always gave a masquerade. All the important people would be there.

I chose to go as an American Indian, liberally daubed with red war paint, in case there was much blood when Paul died. I begged Paul and Melanie to allow me to choose their costumes. They agreed, they thought the idea amusing.

I made Paul a Cossack officer complete with rakish fur hat, boots, and the flowing Cossack cavalryman's robe with all the fittings of curved sword and bullets. Melanie, of course, was to be a Scots Highlander with sword and *dirk*. I hated to see a woman wearing the proud dress of a Highland warrior, but it was necessary. The dirk must be in sight.

New Year's Eve came. They were all there, our friends and business associates. A large, noisy, drunken crowd that filled our main ballroom. I danced much with Melanie that night. I feigned drunkenness and kissed her many times.

As midnight approached the party grew louder and wilder. The main room was packed with merrymakers. People wandered through the smaller rooms in total confusion. In the chaos of the night, the melee of myriad costumes, only my wing of the house was empty.

Just before midnight I quietly asked Paul to come to my study for a moment. Half drunk as he was, he asked no questions. It was child's play to dance once more with Melanie and, playfully, ask her to show me how she held a dirk.

A few moments later, in the press of all the people, I lifted the dirk carefully from its sheath with my gloved hand as she danced past. I touched it low, with only my fingers, down near the blade.

The dirk held close to my leg, I walked quickly through the thick

crowd of people. No one noticed me. In the long corridor to my wing there was no one. I walked down the corridor to my study, entered, and locked the door behind me.

Paul smiled drunkenly. I stood with my back to the door, the dirk still hidden against my leg. I did not smile. Paul looked at me. I think it was then that he knew.

"You wanted to talk, Angus old man?" Paul said.

"No," I said, "I don't want to talk. I want what is mine."

"Yours? What the devil do you mean?"

"Mine! All of it! Mine because I'm strong enough to take it!"

It was then that I heard the strange voice of the old man in the shop in Scotland. I heard it as clearly as if the old man were in the study with me now. *The man becomes like the dirk, and the dirk becomes like the man.* I felt my arm lengthen as I brought the dirk out from hiding. I could feel a wave of power move up my arm to my beating heart.

"Don't be insane, Angus!"

"We're alone, no one can hear over the noise out there, the door is locked. I am very sane, Paul."

"You can't get away with it, you fool!"

"But I can, Paul," I said as I stepped closer to him.

The dirk was eighteen inches long. I did not need to hold it by the hilt. I held it in my gloved hand just below the cross guard. I have a small hand. Held that way, there was still fourteen or more inches of blade to stab with. After he was dead it would be a simple matter to push it in another few inches, leaving only the hilt protruding. The hilt with Melanie's fingerprints.

"You see, Paul," I explained, "the door is locked, no one will hear you scream. It is almost midnight. I will walk out of here, and, later, they will find you. Who can say exactly when it happened? They will find you with the dirk."

Paul began to scream then. I allowed him one scream. I wanted to hear one scream. Then I plunged the knife into his chest.

Now I know the truth of the dirk. Sometimes, now, I hear the old man laughing. I know how he lured me on, that old man from nowhere, how the dirk lured me on. I can only surmise where that old man really came from with his legend. It was all true, the legend, how malignantly true. I know now that I am a weak man, and the dirk became part of me as the legend said.

That night, there in the study, Paul paralyzed with his fear, I plunged the dirk directly into the pocket of that Cossack robe that was over Paul's heart. I remember that I laughed as I struck. I struck and waited for the blood to spurt and give me my inheritance. There was no blood. Paul did not fall.

I plunged the dirk into Paul's

chest and saw that evil blade bend and melt like a blade of soft rubber.

The blade bent and twisted and curled back on itself like the weakest blade of tin.

I am sure I heard the old man laugh.

I fainted then.

Now I have been lying ill for a long time, here in this white room. Sometimes I hear the skirl of the bagpipes, a strange, mocking, distorted melody. Often they talk in the room, all of them. They stand above my bed in the white room with the bars on the windows and they say that I wanted to kill Paul MacPherson.

"He must have gone crazy over there in Scotland," Paul said. "He seemed to think that he was some sort of warrior."

"You were lucky," someone said. I think that it was the sheriff. "Another inch to the left and that dirk would have missed the shell cases in that Cossack uniform and finished you."

"The blade just snapped off," I hear Paul explain. "It hit the shells in the uniform and snapped. I told him that blade was a fake, just a weak imitation."

So that is what they think, that my dirk was a fake, a cheap tourist dirk with a weak blade. But I know better. The blade of the dirk did not snap off; it bent like rubber when I struck.

The legend is true, only I did not understand the legend until now. Now I know that the old man trapped me with his legend and his dirk. He lured me to this silent white room that I will never leave.

"Just a cheap fake," Paul said above me somewhere in the white room.

I wanted to laugh. Of course that is what they think. Because that is what the dirk wants them to think. They must have an explanation, Paul and the police, and the dirk has given them one. But we know better, the dirk and I. I can prove it, yes. I was the one who chose that Cossack uniform with the heavy shells in the breast pocket! Don't you see?

I picked that costume that defeated me. But it was not really I who chose that costume. *It was the dirk, my enemy!*

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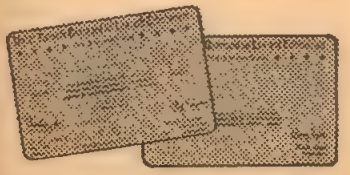

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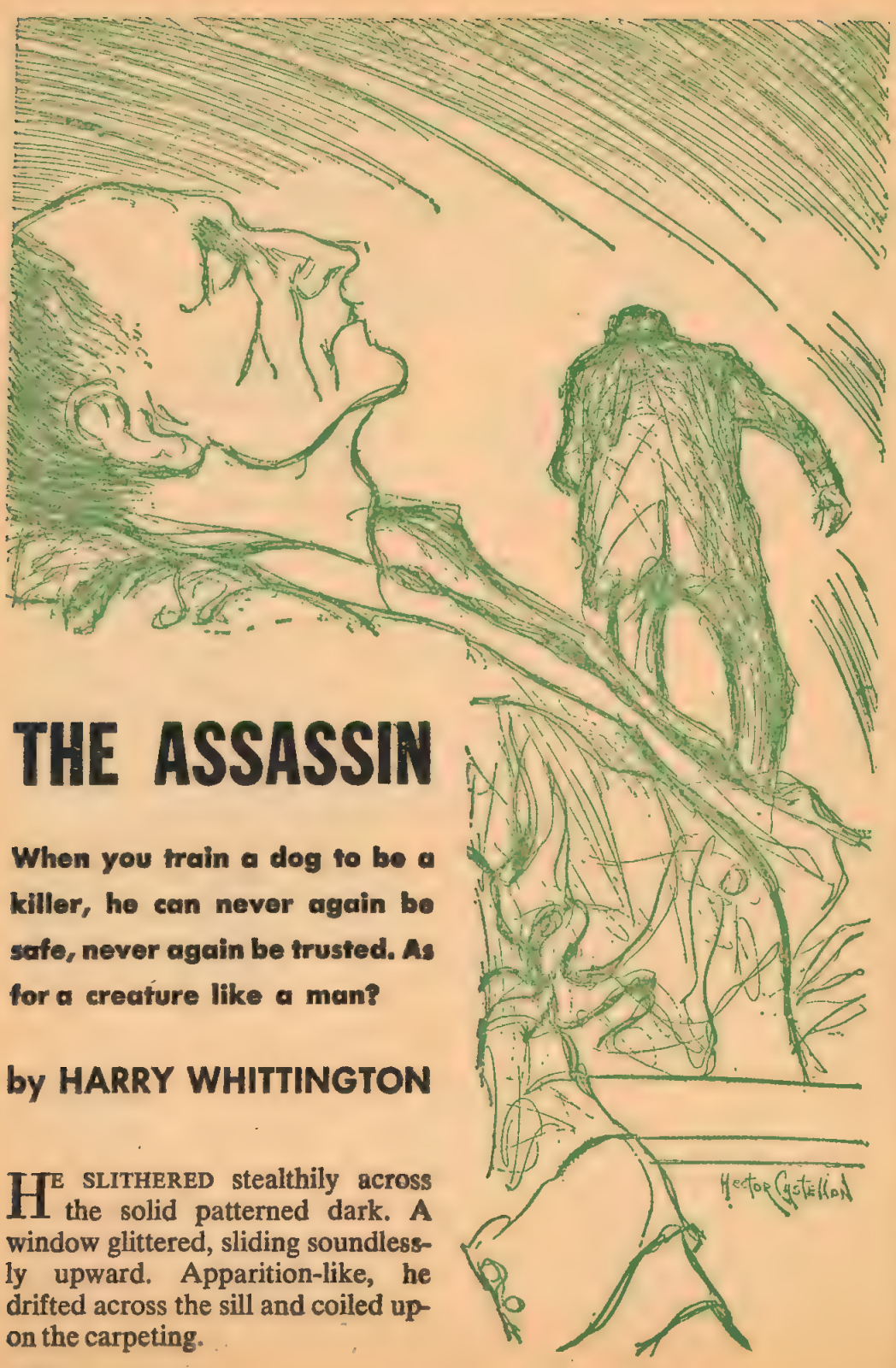

THE ASSASSIN

When you train a dog to be a killer, he can never again be safe, never again be trusted. As for a creature like a man?

by HARRY WHITTINGTON

HE SLITHERED stealthily across the solid patterned dark. A window glittered, sliding soundlessly upward. Apparition-like, he drifted across the sill and coiled upon the carpeting.

Across the study, the project engineer dozed at his cluttered desk in a somber halo of light. The box of specifications lay open beside him, secure to his gaze only, inside its ring of human guards, electronic warning devices, patrol dogs.

Caught in the apex of yawning, the engineer shook his head, more incredulous than frightened, when the garrotte looped past his eyes and constricted, a silken strand at the base of his throat.

Alert, with fast reflexes, extraordinary intelligence, he came upward, muscles tightening, hands grasping out for any weapon, fighting fiercely.

He tried to cry out, could not. He struck blindly with a letter opener and heard an indrawn gasp of pain.

The silk thread closed relentlessly. He tried to go on breathing and could not. He tried to go on living, but he could not do that, either. He was quickly, noiselessly slain.

The assassin slumped a moment at the desk, his gloved fist pressed against the burn in his gut. Then he raked all the papers from the desk into the box, closed it, and crossed the thick piled carpet. He did not look back . . .

* * *

THE TRAIL was cold and so was Blaisdell. He stood on the curb and stared up at Draper's stone house across the winter street, thinking back over the desperation that had brought him to this place where he'd known instinctively he was going to have to come, eventually.

It had begun weeks ago in an office before an illumined map showing this area encircled, a red three-mile perimeter with Costain's home as its center.

Blaisdell scowled. He could not shake the thought from his mind that it had all begun fifteen years ago in a chilled Korean winter, and it angered him that he could not forget that distant mission and the one agent who killed and never asked why, even in his own heart. Things were different then; a man knew who his enemy was, even if he couldn't always see him.

The murder of Costain, the theft of secret papers, had ground slowly to a halt and Blaisdell had sat with pen and notebook, running the tapes one more time.

He sat, ears attuned to the playback. The ultra-sensitive cones had registered even the sibilant sound of Costain's relaxed breathing, the sweet agony of a yawn—and then the sound of Costain's death by strangulation. But of his attacker there was nothing, except one sharp gasp of shock when Costain drove the steel letter-opener into him. Nothing else, neither his coming nor going after the blueprints rattled into the box—on their way where?

Blaisdell had glanced up at Carmack. Carmack was one of the fresh-faced, brush-cut, clean young

career men. Blaisdell said, "These tapes. No good. That interlocking relay system is gone, too."

"Have we really washed out at Costain's?"

"A theft in a burglar-proofed complex? Yes. We've exhausted that—polygraphs for the guards, saliva tests for the dogs, spot-checks for the warning system. Everything okay."

"Except that somebody killed Costain."

"Yes. Except for that."

"It's like throwing the whole project back ten years," Carmack said. "Fantastic."

"So was the killing and the theft," Blaisdell said.

"So what do we do now?"

Blaisdell exhaled. "We stop hoping for breaks. We either make our own, or admit those priceless blueprints are irrecoverably lost."

"Is that what you want to do, Colonel?"

"Yes. But I can't. It's too easy—and by now I've learned nothing's easy."

Blaisdell ordered Carmack to assign agents to every house, alley and street inside the red circle.

Carmack returned, excitement showing through his professional calm. "We ran the complete neighborhood check, Colonel. We didn't find anyone who saw anything unusual the night Costain was killed, but ten bills says you'll flip when you hear who lives three blocks from Costain's home."

"Parnell Draper?" Blaisdell said without looking up.

Carmack winced. "Bets are off, Colonel. You want a run-down made on him?"

"Certainly."

Carmack dared to smile ruefully. "A retired C.I.A. agent? What will people say?"

"That we're thorough—"

"That we don't trust our own government men—"

"I'm afraid, at this stage, I no longer care what people say."

"Shall I send someone to see Draper?" Carmack paused. "Or will you see him?"

"I shall. Reluctantly."

"Weren't you his commander in Korea, sir?"

"Yes."

"Wasn't he, as rumored, the most efficient agent we ever had?"

"Yes. Never stopped training. Never forgot a detail. Killed without conscience, like a machine. I hated to sleep in the same room with him."

Carmack tried to smile. "Don't you think a man should love his work?"

Blaisdell had come to Draper's home.

He'd delayed as long as he could, but his reluctance intensified rather than decreased. He could have ordered an agent here, but he'd known all along, it was something he had to do himself.

He shrugged his jacket up on his shoulders against the winter chill

and approached the somber stone house enclosed inside a thick pepper hedge and a three-foot chain-link fence.

"Those old days are gone, and Draper's retired now," he told himself. But he felt an odd creepiness at the nape of his neck. A retired Marine commando? A sharp-honed assassin turned to pasture?

As Blaisdell approached the front door, he saw a German shepherd leashed on a short chain outside the house. The dog snarled, baring fangs, lunging against the heavy steel chain, oblivious to its choke collar.

Blaisdell remembered the savage-trained canines, taught to slash a man's throat open at a command. He'd seen them standing, mouths slavering, dripping blood over a victim. Trained to kill.

Draper opened the door himself.

Except that he stood straighter, as if held rigid by spines of a brace, or by inner determination never to genuflect to time, he seemed unchanged.

Blaisdell couldn't believe it. Draper had been older than the others of that command in Korea. Under medium height, wiry, Draper still had that soulless flatness in his queerly opaque blue eyes. It had been difficult to guess his age then. It was impossible now. The lines about his mouth showed a sullen set that was not new.

Draper laughed pleasurably and thrust out his hand.

Blaisdell instinctively hesitated before he touched it. But Draper noted nothing. He said, "Colonel! Come in!"

Draper conducted him on a tour of his ten-room home, swollen with pride. Upon retirement, he said, he'd married a woman some years older than he. She died, willing him this house and a considerable estate.

Draper was less enthused about his inherited opulence than the trophies littering his study from his days as a commando, an O.S.S. officer, an intelligence agent behind North Korean lines. He drew his hands lovingly across the gadgets, the memories of blood and fearful, alien dark. Samurai swords. Lugers. Grenades. Chinese military seals.

"We took them, didn't we, Colonel?" Draper stared at his lean fingers as if he hadn't yet washed off the blood. "They told us they wanted maps, deployment data, troop movements. We went and we got them, didn't we?"

Blaisdell nodded.

"And what is your enemy doing now, Colonel? A bothersome investigator someone wants out of the way? A recalcitrant envoy, maybe? An uncooperative official of some emerging nation?"

Blaisdell frowned. "We have worked on precisely such cases, Parnell."

"Sure you have. I can smell them. They can shunt me out, but

they can't take away my skills, my instincts, eh, Colonel?"

"Do you miss it that much?"

Draper's knuckles showed white on a sword haft. "What right did they have to retire me? A promotion and out! What right? Suppose I had twenty years. I wasn't yet forty, and sharper than ever. I took care of my body, my mind, my reflexes. I still do. Only Intelligence didn't care then. Nobody cares now. But I do."

The dog barked, whining in the side yard. Draper suddenly pounced across the room, cat-like, throwing open the French doors.

Blaisdell followed him out to the terrace.

"Get out of here, kid!" Draper yelled.

Blaisdell saw a child of eight run from the fence where he'd been pushing his fingers through the links toward the dog.

Draper swore. "That kid. Over here all the time, spying on me."

Blaisdell laughed. "A child? You brought all your old suspicions home with you, too."

Draper exhaled, nodded. "Yes. I guess so. I learned to trust nobody. Child or adult. That kid. I've warned him. If that damned dog gets loose—"

"Quite a pet."

"Renegade's no pet," Draper said. "That's a canine corps dog. Age got him, too. I took him when they were going to gas him."

"I never suspected you were sentimental."

"I'm not. I don't keep Ren for a pet. Once they've been trained to kill, they're never any good as pets."

"Why did you bring him home?"

Draper straightened. "To remind me. That's what they do to us when they're through with us. We risk our lives. Then they throw us out on a stinking pension! They warn us not to kill any more, only that's all they ever trained us to do —Ren since he was ten months old, me, since I was eighteen. Every style, every new and advanced method. I learned them all—and I learned them better than the next man."

Inside the study, Draper poured them two ounces of Scotch. He did not cut it with water or ice. "What are you doing out here, Colonel? The Costain case?"

Blaisdell's grip tightened on his glass. "If there were a Costain case, Draper, it would be top-priority secret."

Draper grinned coldly. "You ought to know, Colonel. We get so we can smell it. Eh? Oh, I read that Costain died of a coronary occlusion. It didn't fool me. Everybody dies when his heart stops, eh, Colonel?"

He shook his head. "I've seen your young clowns slinking around out here. You couldn't guess they were intelligence people—not from three miles away."

"You don't luck on to Parnell Drapers in the service everyday," Blaisdell said.

"True." Draper took a long drink of Scotch. "But you may yet need one if these jerks are representative of your finest—"

"We work with what we have, Parnell. But at that we may luck on to something. We've turned up a witness."

Draper finished off his Scotch. He straightened a pair of crossed swords. "On a job like that? Darkest night of the year? And don't be tiresome enough to ask how I know—I heard the ambulance that night. It was three o'clock. I won't pretend stupidity even for you, Colonel. But a witness? Not that night, Colonel. Impossible."

Blaisdell shrugged. "Well, that's the way it bounces. The imponderables. A nosy neighbor—"

"What'd she say she saw?" he said, a little incredulously.

Blaisdell smiled. "Did I say it was a woman?"

Draper laughed. "You said nosy."

"Woman isn't a synonym for betrayal to every man, Parnell."

"Maybe if they'd had my luck with them it would be."

"Well, we've got to make our own luck on this one. I'd better go. I hope I can trust you to be discreet with what you—surmise?"

Draper's flat eyes glinted in triumph. "You are working on the case. Well, if anyone could break it, Colonel, I'd bet on you. Wish I were working with you. Like the old days, huh?"

Blaisdell shook his head. "You could never afford this pad on government pay, Parnell."

* * *

"DRAPER'S our man." Blaisdell's voice was even with the illness imbedded deeply. He slouched at his desk, remembering Draper's nightmares. The way he woke up screaming. Fifteen years ago in a bleak, remote land that could have been Draper's home because he had none.

Carmack stared at him. Blaisdell saw Carmack found it as incredible as he had.

"He stood before me, almost dared me to outguess him. Everything he said—almost as if an obvious lie. He even lied to me about having married an heiress who willed him that house. Why would he use a lie that he must have known I recognized?"

"Didn't he ever marry?"

"Yes. A bar waitress. She ran away and left him." He sighed. "And then he ticked off cases of assassinations. He knew the time Costain died."

Carmack scowled. "He was always brilliant, Colonel. He *could* have pieced it together. He has no other thing to do."

"No. There's more. He stands straight, as if wearing a corset. It's

adhesive bandages, where Costain almost gutted him."

"Can't we move in?"

"No. He'd love that. There's no form of interrogation he hasn't used on some poor devil in the past. He could withstand everything because he's left no more trace of his crimes than smoke leaves. He'd love to laugh in our faces. It's one satisfaction I'm damned if I'll give him."

"He's daring you to trap him. Is that it?"

"No. It's more than that with him. If he's doing anything, he's laughing at me. At us. And he knows I'd never challenge him in a contest."

"We're not going to let him get away with it?"

"No. I can work only on his Achilles heel. Suspicion. He doesn't trust his own left hand, and I've put one doubt in his mind. I let him know we have a witness in the Costain case."

"Oh? Do we?"

Blaisdell laughed. "Never play poker for more than a dollar, Carmack."

"Sorry. You really goosed that one to me. I guess I was hoping we did have a witness."

"As far as Draper knows, we do. He'll stew in that pot as long as he can stand it. Then he'll make an overt move. Sooner or later he'll try to find my witness. If he takes that bait. If he'll just do one violent thing we can get him on, we can break him down."

It took almost two weeks for Blaisdell to set up diagonally across the street on the second floor of an old house that had a view of Draper's place. His men came and went via trucks in the alley, but he and Carmack sat up in the room, sleeping four hours and watching four.

The old room gradually assumed the look of an electronics lab. The key instrument was a directional pick-up, aluminum cones aimed toward Draper's house. They could hear him when he yelled at the dog, flushed the toilet, snapped on the T.V. set.

They kept Draper's home on target and they waited in their conditioned patience, the way they'd been trained to wait.

Only Draper continued to follow the drab pattern of the existence to which he'd been forcibly resigned.

He fed the dog, he yelled away the neighbor kid from the fence, he looked and sounded completely adjusted.

"Maybe he knows we're here," Carmack said in despair.

Blaisdell shook his head. "No. If he knew, or even suspected, he'd taunt us, put on little acts. No. We'll just let him simmer."

He simmered an eternal, unchanging week.

"Could you be wrong, Colonel?" Carmack said. He'd stopped shaving. He cultivated a goatee and mustache. "He hasn't made a move. He lives like what he professes to be—a pensioner."

"He lives more like a man with an independent fortune."

"You think he's delivered the specifications?"

"I don't know. But I say my prayers every night."

"Looks like a man who has the money you think he has would have friends over there—"

"He never had a friend in all the years I knew him."

"But he's alone over there. All the time."

"He's stewing. Don't ever think he isn't stewing."

"I hate to be a party-pooper, Colonel, but he isn't following your pattern for him at all. Why, lately he's even made friends with the boy—"

Blaisdell erupted up from the couch. "The boy? The kid that lives across the alley from Draper? What about him? What do you know about him?"

"We checked him and his family out, sir. I supposed you'd seen the précis. His name is Duane Sherman. Eight years old. Parents divorced. He lives over there with his grandmother. She barely knows he's alive. He wanders over the neighborhood, a very neglected little rich boy."

Blaisdell was at the window, staring through it at the front of Draper's home. "And now he's friendly with the boy?"

"I didn't mention it because I thought you'd noticed. He stopped yelling at him. Started giving him candy, inviting him in the house. The kid's over there now, sir."

Blaisdell heeled around. "Turn that receiver up, full volume."

Carmack sprang to the control board, twisted the volume knob on full.

Suddenly it was as if Draper and the Sherman child were in the room with them.

Draper's voice was strident, at a fixed pitch, neither dropping nor rising, simply hammering away, relentlessly. "You were out that night, weren't you, Duane? No sense lying to me about it. I'm not going to tell your grandmother. But you've got to tell me. Remember that night? The ambulances. Three in the morning? Remember? The sirens? You were hiding in the alley, weren't you?"

"No, no, no," Duane was sob-

bing. "I didn't do anything wrong! I wasn't in the alley—"

"Don't lie to me, boy—"

"No, sir, I was in the hedge, with Renegade. I would have told you, but I was scared you'd be mad. I didn't hurt Ren. I wouldn't. I—"

Blaisdell turned from the window, removed the binoculars from his eyes. His face was gray. "Holy God," he whispered. "Keep these glasses fixed on that yard."

"The kid." Carmack whispered it. "There was a witness. The child saw him come in that night. With the box."

He was talking to himself. Blaisdell was already running from the room.

Moving woodenly, Carmack walked to the window, pressed the warmed glasses to his eyes, adjusted them on the French windows across the street. From the receiver, the sounds of Draper's voice and the child's crying blared on. Carmack no longer listened.

He saw the French doors thrown open across the street. He watched Draper drag the boy into the hedge-enclosed yard. The dog's savage yelping shook the receiver cones.

Stunned, Carmack watched Draper grab the child suddenly, pressing his fingers in a karate press under the boy's ear lobe. The child struggled like a fish on a hook, but only for a moment. He went limp abruptly, rendered unconscious in the smoothest professional manner.

Then Draper lifted the inert body and tossed it on the ground toward the yowling dog.

Draper stepped forward, unsnapped the dog's leash. Snarling like a ravening wolf, the dog lunged upward across the prone child.

Draper screamed, retreating. He toppled under the fierce impact of the dog.

Carmack saw Blaisdell running across the street but before Blaisdell could vault the fence, Draper was dead, his throat torn open.

Whimpering, his muzzle bloodied, the dog stood immobile over the child. Blaisdell approached warily. The dog snarled.

Carmack saw the .32 in Blaisdell's hand. He wondered why he didn't kill the dog.

The dog remained frozen until the boy regained consciousness and himself snapped the leash on its choke collar.

The boy turned, saw Draper's body. He burst into tears, wailing out to Blaisdell. "I didn't spy on him. I didn't! I tried to tell him! He wouldn't listen. I was—lonely, that's all. And Ren was lonely. He loved me—"

Blaisdell nodded. He replaced his gun in its shoulder holster. He thought about what Draper had said: Once they'd been trained to kill, they could never go back to the way they'd lived before.

He shivered slightly in the early night. The dog had been reclaimed. But the man? Once they'd been trained to kill—

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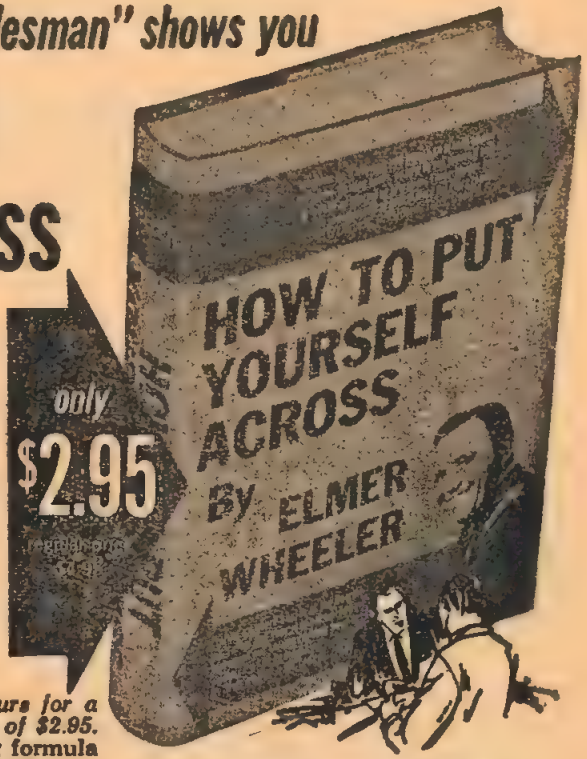

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A COLLECTOR OF KEYS

Who could he be—the phantom thief who had become master of the secret lives —and fortunes—of a city's richest men? One man alone dared to guess the answer . . .

TIM KING, sergeant plain-clothesman of central detective bureau, Detroit police department, never expected a wrenching throwback in time when he answered the squad room inter-com summons to go to the office of his commander, Captain Frederick Hatch. But there was the triggering symbol of his former easy-going life: the imposing John K. Baines, looking friendly and competent, just like the frequent pictures of him in the *Free Press*.

A millionaire bank president now, Baines had once been a locker room companion of Tim King's father, Waldo King, at the Downtown Athletic Club. That was more than twenty years ago, before Tim's dad made the wrong bet on a motor stock and lost his fortune, lost the family colonial mansion in Grosse Pointe, and worst of all, lost the will to live.

Seeing John K. Baines made Tim King's thoughts revert to what his life might have been growing up with the children of the so-called gasoline aristocracy,—attending college at Ann Arbor instead of Wayne, entering the dynamic auto industry with the advantages of insider connections.

The thoughts were not as depressing as they might have been

by TOM MORIARTY

because thirty-two-year-old Tim King was in a game he liked. He liked it principally because he was succeeding on his own, even if most of his superiors did have him typed for "the class jobs" in upper bracket circles, rather than for dark alley shoot-outs.

Since John K. Baines sparked no recollection upon hearing the name Tim King in the introductions, the detective remained silent. This was not the time to indulge in out-of-place nostalgia. Something unusual must have happened to bring this famous Motor City executive in to police headquarters.

Mr. Baines reputedly had any number of vice-presidents at his beck and call to handle most things. The man was head of Belmont Trust Bank, the equivalent of Chase in New York. From its explosive offices in the Empire Motors Building on Grand Boulevard, he directed financial services to many of Michigan's automobile manufacturers, a job requiring assets in the billions.

"Mr. Baines has requested secrecy on this one," said Captain Hatch to his sergeant. "Naturally, the department respects his wishes. Report only to me on this case, King. Now, Mr. Baines, let's start at the beginning with the name of the gentleman who reported the safe deposit box loss."

Up to this moment, the young plain-clothesman had associated the word bank with messages thrust at tellers: "Hand over the cash—I got a gun."

A loss in the safe deposit box department was indeed almost unheard of.

"His name is Edward Radfills," said the bank official. "You've probably heard of him. President of St. Claire Texstell, one of the largest fabric suppliers in the auto industry. On this gentleman's claim, the bank is reimbursing thirty-five thousand dollars mysteriously missing from his safe deposit box. Mr. Radfill's word is as good as his bond with me."

The banker's reaction was typical of Detroit and the quick-decision kingpins who ran the city, Tim King was well aware. As a matter of record, Radfills had been another member of his father's old circle at the D.A.C. and the exclusive Recess Club.

King dutifully made notations of the name and the amount of loss. Then he learned that the case involved a rare theft category: impersonation and forgery in a public place which was ever under strong security.

"A thief apparently got in there on the strength of his appearance and his signature on a card," said Baines. "The signature looked to me almost like a carbon copy of Ed Radfill's, although my manager raises a doubt about it. The date of burglary was September twenty-first. Ed Radfills says he did not visit the vaults until today, three

weeks later, when he caught up with the loss."

"Has a similar theft ever taken place at Belmont, or anywhere you know of?" King asked.

"Never," said Baines. "Never anywhere, to my knowledge. The nearest thing to robbing a vault was a tunnel-under job some time ago. So you will understand why we are pretty much unnerved to be the first hit by this shocking method. As a matter of fact, we prided ourselves on the way our department was run. Marcus Amsdorf has been with us thirty years. He's a top-notch security man."

"Does he identify customers with file photos as well as signatures?" Tim King asked.

"No," said Baines. "We talked about photos once. But photos go out of date fast. Besides, people don't like the rogue's gallery treatment. We have the standard signature system, with information card backing it up. The customer is judged, questioned in rare cases, and approved on the spot, then accompanied into the vaults. The attendant uses a master key to open the box in combination with the customer's key."

"The man had to look a lot like Mr. Radfills, then," said King.

"That seems to be it," said Baines. "The crook is not only a mobile forger, but a clever impersonator. It gives me the shudders to think what we are up against. I don't dare to estimate how many millions of dollars in currency and negotiable stock and bonds are in those boxes."

The young detective was thinking along the same lines, and the process knotted his handsome face into a craggy facade that made him look older. He was pleased, nonetheless, to be assigned to this tough case.

Before, there had been the shadow of a doubt about his true status. He felt that he had been regarded as something of a maverick because of the King family background. Detroit had a curious caste system of its own.

King said to Baines, "This could have gone unnoticed for months and months. At least you are lucky to have found out about it so quickly. What would you say is the average interval of time between uses of boxes by customers of the Radfills type—people known to be wealthy and not exactly using a box for their weekly petty cash?"

"By rule of thumb," said Baines, "a person visits his box twice a year. A few people, according to the last report I have from Mr. Amsdorf, have not opened boxes for anywhere from five to ten years, some longer."

When the banker left, Captain Hatch summed up what Tim King had already decided in his mind. "The safe deposit box business is in for a real jolt," the captain said, "if this gets around. I wonder how many times that actor-forger has

made trips to his gold mine on Grand Boulevard?"

An apt description, thought King. In a city of great wealth in high places, with hundreds of executives paid annually in five—and six-figure amounts, a large group of the richer personalities operated from business offices in the Grand Boulevard-Second Boulevard area. The bank's S.D.B. department therefore served as a kind of lesser Fort Knox for them in its apparent security.

Tim King met the personable Radfills in his office suite in the Empire Motors Building. Like Baines, Radfills did not connect Tim King, detective, as son of Waldo King, late auto entrepreneur.

The young detective now got first hand confirmation of the crook's artistry. Radfills's impersonator had walked into the safe deposit box area, downstairs in the basement of this same building, with horn-rimmed glasses, white button-down shirt, a lively four-in-hand tie, and a dark suit.

The impersonator would have parted a full head of grey hair on the left side, close to the ear, and worn a black Homburg hat of the style popular in the former Eisenhower years. Such a hat was on top of the Radfills work table in the office.

All in all, quite a job of make-up and costuming. If the unknown could do that, he was certainly capable of doing much more along the same lines. King decided one thing: the Radfills weight of approximately two hundred pounds and height of about five feet nine inches would be the basic statistics of other people marked for impersonation.

"You were out of town on September twenty-first," said King. "Somebody quite evidently knew you were. Anything special about that trip?"

"That day was a Monday," Radfills said. "Once a month I become a manufacturer's agent—a peddler, as they say in the industry—and make the rounds of our customers outside Detroit. I go to Pontiac and Flint, staying at Flint overnight. Then I go on to Saginaw and Lansing, staying at each place overnight. I always start on a Monday early. The p.a.'s and engineers at Pontiac, Buick, GM Truck, Chevrolet, and Oldsmobile have come to expect me on such a schedule, usually the third week of the month. So I was gone from Monday through Thursday."

"Have you ever had the feeling of being observed behind your back, or of somebody having been in your hotel room while you were out?"

"Can't say I have."

"Where do you keep your safe deposit box key. Mr. Radfills? People pick a favorite place, I've heard, so they won't ever forget where they hid it."

"So do I. Right in here." He

pointed to an expensive briefcase in Cordovan leather. The lock on it was of top quality, a machined product not easy to tamper with. Radfills opened the briefcase and took out a soft-leather folder from among a batch of papers.

"The key is in this little folder of valuables," he explained. "When I'm not traveling I put the folder in the office safe. I'm the only one with the combination. The reason I carry the folder on trips is that certain papers—new-design sketches, formulas, and such—mean real big money in my work. They are the secrets of future styles and mechanical ideas in the auto industry. I don't trust anybody to get his hands on them. I regarded the safe deposit box key as equally valuable and I've always put it in this folder. Here it is."

He took out the brass key and handed it to King. The number on the key was 9637. To make a duplicate of that key, King judged, would require the skill of a professional locksmith.

"Is this the only key?"

"No. My wife has access to the box also and she has a duplicate of this one."

"And her key was also untouched?"

"So she said." Radfills then smiled somewhat sheepishly. "In fact I did not see her key, nor do I know where she stashes it away."

He took up the telephone and asked his secretary to call his home. In some seconds he was talking to his wife, saying, "Please go to where you keep your safe deposit box key and see if it is there."

About forty seconds later the answer came back that the key was there and untouched.

"I live in a part of Grosse Pointe," Radfills said, "where there's the best private residential security. I haven't heard of a robbery in that section in years."

Tim King left the meeting with updated speculative thoughts. Instead of one master thief, he could be up against an organization of specialists. Perhaps one crook would be the key expert, one the actor and forger, and others spotters.

The immediate unanswered questions were: how did a spotter fasten on Radfills as the victim in the first place; how did the actor manage to study Radfills's looks, clothes, and mannerisms; how did the team know of Radfills's movements, in order to choose the day on which he left town?

Knowledge of the regularly-spaced trips by Radfills could be gained by a criminal in two ways, Tim King reasoned: firstly, in Detroit from someone on the inside; or secondly, in any of the towns visited, from a gang member outside. Investigation up-state as well as in the Motor City itself seemed in order, if only to check out the possibility of outside cooperation. Captain Hatch agreed.

"Edward Radfills is pretty much typical of these big wheels," Hatch said. "You and I know that their interests are quite the same—certain hotels, clubs, habits."

"My father used to make that same up-state swing," said King. "Regular as clockwork."

Hatch looked quizzically at his sergeant.

"Funny, isn't it, that Baines and Radfills never connected you up with Waldo King—the great Waldo King, whose life, achievements, and family were once a local legend. That's in your favor, Tim. A detective worth his salt is usually anonymous."

TIM KING drove north to Flint the next morning. In Flint, a visit to FPD brought help from a plainclothesman, who shepherded the way to the Duralmont Hotel, Radfills's favorite, and a confidential introduction to the manager. Doing it this way, the Detroit detective did not have to break official secrecy and explain in detail his reasons for checking records.

All employes of the Duralmont had been on the payroll for at least a year, King found. The management vouched for their honesty and character, from the assistant manager down to bellboys and chambermaids.

King drove on to Saginaw and repeated his quest, again coming up with negative results. He stayed overnight at the Saginaw Bayview, another Radfills favorite, and continued on to Lansing in the morning.

In the Michigan state capitol, the first indication of a potential clue popped up. Three men had been dismissed from the employ of the Hotel Hanscomb for petty infractions of the rules during the past six months, one of them less than a month ago. Two had been desk clerks and one a bellboy.

King took their names and drove about Lansing, again with a police companion, in a routine check-out. He wanted to see if they had a hoodlum flavor about them, in looks or in living conditions.

The two desk clerks were now working on the assembly line of a body factory and had fairly prosperous home living conditions. They were local-born men whose names had never been written on a police file card.

The wife of the bellboy, Bill White, when discovered in a low-rent part of town, said that her husband had gone to California in search of a better job.

"He lit out all of a sudden after some argument he had with the hotel people," she said. "Bitsie heard about some big new hotel opening on the coast. He sent his first money to me last week."

King considered that the bellboy undoubtedly would qualify to work in a modern new hotel, for the Hotel Hanscomb was a recently smartened-up hostelry.

On the drive back, down Highway 16, King questioned his judgment. A futile effort is disheartening. The swing around Michigan's heartlands had lost him time. Perhaps he had made the wrong first move. Like they said in the auto industry, he had "thrown to the wrong base."

He started out grimly the next day, going to the scene of the crime itself in the basement of the Empire Motors Building. He introduced himself to Marcus Amsdorf, the manager, and found that this man lived up to the mental picture conveyed by Mr. Baines, who had described him as experienced and capable.

"I'm sorry," said the rugged Amsdorf, who looked more impatient than sorry. "I can't stop in the middle of my duties and talk to you."

The remark stung Tim King. He could not recollect ever being put off this way in line of duty. A detective was ordinarily welcomed on official calls in Detroit big business circles.

"I know what you're here for," Amsdorf said. "I know Mr. Baines wants everything confidential. Did you ever think that what we say at this counter might be overheard by a customer? You never can tell. I'll get together with you after hours. That's five o'clock, closing time."

"Can't you call in an assistant for ten minutes?"

"No, I can't. Not after what happened. Or what Mr. Baines thinks happened, would be more accurate. I'm double-checking everything myself."

"But Mr. Baines offered any help you might give us."

The manager was obviously made of stern stuff. "I'm running this department," he said stiffly, "until Mr. Baines tells me I'm not."

Tim King grudgingly respected him for putting it that way, and at the same time disliked him cordially. But not wanting to blow the whistle on any man, King decided to postpone interviewing Amsdorf until the early morning hours, a half hour before the department's doors were thrown open.

The young detective now paused to look around outside the Amsdorf principality. Outside, that is, of the martinet's desk and counter.

Adjacent to this customer sign-in counter was a fence of polished steel bars with a steel door inset in it. Through the jail-like fence were

rows and rows of small boxes, making a glistening frieze of locks fit into what is technically known as "wards"—hundreds of them.

The person who robbed Radfills surely had to be a man of ice-cold nerves, King realized. First, the thief had to breezily forge himself in, a feat of fabulous photo-memory and nerve discipline. Second, he had to smoothly open the correct box behind these jail bars, as if familiar with the act. Third, he had to wait casually at the jail-like gate to be let out by the tough and suspicious Marcus Amsdorf.

"Have you ever run up against a forger of this type before?" he asked Amsdorf. The question was merely a test of the man's alertness, for King already knew the answer, from Baines.

"I don't believe there is such a man in the world," the manager said. "It can still turn out to be some kind of a mistake."

"On the customer's part? For your information, he was definitely out of town on September twenty-first."

"He could have got his dates mixed."

"Have it your own way. But the handwriting experts have yet to be heard from."

Coming back up the stairs from the department, a curious fact impressed itself on King. This basement corner, which was part of an arcade in the building's center light well, had scarcely any traffic of building dwellers. It was a lonely location. Overlooking the corner of the arcade was a restaurant, with its entrance-exit doors placed beyond on the street side of the building.

King decided to visit the restaurant. He thought it wise to get a line on its downward view, through plate glass windows, to the entry stairs leading to the safe deposit department.

A clear, sweeping downward view came to his eyes when the stood at the quick-service counter section of the restaurant.

From here, King realized immediately, any stray coffee sipper could identify people going in and out of the S.D.B. department stairway. The entry was well lit. As if to confirm his finding, a well-known high-ranking sales executive of Empire Motors passed by below and disappeared down the department stairs.

Here, then, was at least one point of observation that a criminal could use to choose his prospects, to work up a list of VIP's.

The thief had to be patient as well as imaginative. He probably had a mature, as well as precise mind. Such a mind would hardly trip himself up. King's conclusion was that a matching patience was required, on the part of the police, in order to bait a trap. The trap was the lonely arcade. The bait would be some Detroit personality.

Captain Hatch agreed with this

conclusion only after some argument. He said, "Brother, that's taking the slow boat to China. The bait way will take weeks and weeks to turn up the skimpiest kind of lead, and may still take us down a blind alley."

King said, "Do we have an alternative? Except for scaring up an underworld tip—and if we did get lucky and do that, we'd get publicity all over town in off-the-record circles, exactly what Mr. Baines doesn't want. Oh, if we had only one tangible clue, one little print—"

"Yes, I guess maybe you're right," Hatch said. "The Radfills signature was confirmed as a forgery. And the card didn't dust, except for Amsdorf's handling. Nor the metal box, nor its wall facing. I'm beginning to think that this Amsdorf isn't much of an expert as Mr. Baines thinks he is. Amsdorf certainly should have noticed any odd movements by a customer to wipe things clean."

"Let's keep Amsdorf out of things, as far as possible. I have no faith in the guy. I have a feeling he would ball it up somehow if he was in on our plans. Anyway, I can do just that without tipping him off. I'm seeing him in the morning. He gave me the brush-off today. I'll give him the run-around tomorrow."

In the morning, Tim King visited Marcus Amsdorf on schedule. He found his opinion of the man reinforced. In the calm of a closed office Amsdorf was still a high-handed, self-appointed expert with no particular respect for the police.

King listened to him explain the highlights of his quite ordinary system. A feature of this was the Alert Card, as the manager pridefully described it. Alert Cards handled such matters as court injunctions against the opening of boxes, such as to prevent illegal use by a surviving wife or husband prior to probate of an estate. There was nothing new to such a precaution.

Tim King recalled that a deposit box of his father had been closed to his mother pending bankruptcy court's inventory of assets.

Soon King was casually running down the customer list and making mental notes. The people he picked were so prominent in the national automobile industry that King himself could visualize each as to age, facial characteristics, and customary dress. They were men whom his father had started out with, playing the big wheel of fortune.

Seeing this list in full view on the top of the customer counter, the young detective judged that Amsdorf was mighty careless in this matter. A waiting customer, alone at the counter, could run through the list and note the names and box numbers of fellow patrons of the service. So could an imaginative, daring thief.

The detective's next stop was in the main lobby offices of Belmont

Trust Bank and the patrician office of John K. Baines.

"Captain Hatch phoned me about your plan," said Mr. Baines. "Let's see your list."

He quickly marked off the names of Hendrik van Attelaer, Chairman of the Board of the Woodward Truck and Bus Company; Vance Iliff, President of Jackson Brothers Body Company; and Ewald T. Adams, Executive Vice-President of Empire Motors.

"Each of these men is about average build, like Radfills is," the bank president said, "but each has a certain patented distinction in appearance and personality. For example, 'Dutch' van Attelaer is real folksy, talks with an accent almost like a comedian and dresses in an old-fashioned way. Yes, about the way he came to this country as an immigrant years ago. High collar, black flowing tie. Vance is a slick, happy-go-lucky type. Wears sport clothes the year round. Ewald always wears a bright red tie, a funny habit he got into when he was a sales manager. Oh, yes, he wears a hat with the brim turned down all around."

Three days later, Tim King met the three business figures in person in the Baines office and was delighted at the willing way in which they had joined in the conspiracy. Shrewd old "Dutch" van Attelaer, self-made millionaire, was the sharpest of them all.

"Good thinking, mein boy," he said. Tim King wondered just how long ago it was that the gentleman had come over from the Old Country. "Live baits catch fish. You come to mein plant next week. Some crook, he's robbing truck parts on me."

Vance Iliff said, "The least you can do, J.K., is let us go in there first and clean out our boxes before the crook gets on the job."

"If he gets there first, the bank reimburses one hundred percent," Baines countered.

"But I myself don't know whether I have twenty or sixty thousand dollars tucked away," said Iliff.

"In that case, we would split the difference," said Baines. "Our indemnity insurance covers the bank like a blanket."

In the end, a schedule was made up. Each man agreed to dress uniformly accordingly to his likes and to go in turn to the Safe Deposit Box Department between 12:00 and 1:30 on successive days, for a period of five business days. They would thus give any unknown observers a high exposure of their faces and clothes. Following these contacts, the men would inform the police of any trips they planned to make out of town.

Tim King studied the obvious distinction of the three businessmen and judged that the maneuver was much more than a simple shot in the dark. The men were widely known to be millionaires. They were big-check givers to the United

Funds, holders of season box tickets at Tiger Stadium, civic ornaments of their two hundred-fifty-year old city. They were most attractive bait for a bigger fish among criminals.

On the day that the plan went into effect, King dropped by to see Marcus Amsdorf again. He wanted to be sure that the manager would be at least as alert as his cards professed to be.

"We think we have uncovered a suspect," King lied. "It was on a tip from an informant."

Amsdorf beamed for a change. Evidently he eagerly anticipated full details on the suspect, perhaps in order to trap him personally. But this time it was King's turn to brush-off Amsdorf.

"I can't give you any information now," said the detective, "but I want to be sure you are ready to go into action if I call you on the phone in the next days or weeks. I'm sure you'll be ready to cooperate as Mr. Baines promised us you would."

Amsdorf made no reply. The silence seemed to generate a bit of electrical tension in the air. It was clear to King that the manager still regarded the world of valuable boxes as a treasure land of his own.

King left the man to his stubborn thoughts.

THE WEEK of alternate appearances by Mssrs. van Attelaer, Iliff, and Adams passed by. On one of those days, Tim King ate his lunch in the elevated restaurant, on a hunch that he might recognize a wanted mugg in the crowd of diners.

From his perch above, King saw Hendrik van Attelaer walk in and out of the basement entry. The man was an imposing eye-catcher, worthy of a stage skit. But the detective saw no wanted face among the coffee drinkers at the short-order counter.

Meanwhile, telephone calls from the volunteer decoys informed King of the travel to be expected. Van Attelaer was going to a branch plant in Grand Rapids for three days.

Iliff was taking a week off to try out a new speed boat motor on Lake St. Claire. Adams was making the rounds to Pontiac, Flint, and Saginaw for a week of visits to several of his parts plants.

At this stage, Captain Hatch kept Tim King close to the squad room and occupied with Mickey Mouse assignments on files and frequency maps, so that the plain-clothesman would be available if the bait worked.

Van Attelaer made his trip and returned.

Iliff went off to his beloved speed boat.

Then van Attelaer scheduled another trip, this time to Flint for a week at his overloaded truck body plant.

King verified the truck manufac-

turer's departure and telephoned to Marcus Amsdorf.

"You know Hendrik van Attelaer by sight?" King asked.

Amsdorf said that he did and that the gentleman had been in the department a short while ago. So he had, the detective thought with a grin, but he said nothing about it to Amsdorf.

"All right, then. If Mr. Van Attelaer comes in between now and next Monday, you are to telephone me or Captain Hatch at once and you are to keep the gate locked until I get there, no matter what van Attelaer says about getting released from the vaults."

"Lock up Mr. Van Attelaer?" said Amsdorf in surprise. "Just what is this? I'll do no such thing."

"This is an order from Mr. Baines," said King. "I suggest you get in touch with him and verify it." King hung up.

Three days passed—and on the fourth morning Marcus Amsdorf called up in a voice of panic.

"I have Mr. Van Attelaer in the vaults," he said. "I told him the vault key would not work."

Enroute up Woodward, the DPD prowl car driver clipped seconds off the unofficial record for running red lights between downtown and Grand Boulevard.

Tim King pushed through a gathering crowd on the basement stairway. He found that a harness cop and two security guards of the Empire Motors Building blocked off the entry to the Marcus Amsdorf counter.

The young detective, with his service pistol at the ready, approached the steel fence and looked through the bars to see a facsimile of Hendrik van Attelaer hunched far in a corner behind a marble writing table.

The man was a bit sunken-cheeked and grey-faced; not puffy, ruddy, and smiling like the real van Attelaer. Otherwise, the make-up and the clothes were fairly close to the mark. King briefly wondered if the man talked with the patented accent.

Unlatching handcuffs from his belt clip, Tim King motioned Amsdorf to open the gate, and walked in.

"You're under arrest," he said. "Suspicion of attempted fraud and grand theft."

He snapped the bracelets on the cowering impersonator, saying, "You ought to go out to Hollywood and get an honest job with the grease paint boys."

The man could have been a cousinly van Attelaer, to say the least.

Amsdorf now reacted just as King had imagined he would.

The manager resumed his full-charge manner, saying, "I've caught him. I told Mr. Baines this was the way to do it."

"What you can do, Mr. Amsdorf said Tim King bluntly, "is clear the crowd away from the entrance. By my orders. I'm taking this fellow to

headquarters, out the side security door. Now get this, Amsdorf. When the reporters show up, tell them an epileptic fainted and is being taken to Emergency. That's all. Don't mention van Attelaer. If somebody says he recognized van Attelaer, tell him it was not van Attelaer, only some foreigner who looked a little like him. Okay?"

Marcus Amsdorf suddenly appeared licked. He nodded. Things were happening too fast in his little closed world.

At the station house, the young detective saw the impersonator go mute, except for repeating one phrase, "I want a lawyer."

Captain Hatch did not seem to hear him. He chose not to hear because the man's pocketbook came up with a vital document.

Even the sharpest minds have their blind spots, as every detective knows. The address was the one on his automobile driver's license. The driver's name was Maurice Rivers.

King took one look and rushed away, now beefed up into a team with plainclothes officers Jensen, Kelly, and Cavanaugh. They sirened up Woodward and turned off a quarter mile past Grand Boulevard into a side street on the east side.

There, in a run-down, mixed neighborhood, they parked the prowl car and walked about fifty yards to the address of Rivers. It was an unpainted relic of an older Detroit, when up-coming automobile executives built castle-like mansions for large families.

Tim King remembered now that as a boy in knickers he had visited some of these homes to play with children of his father's friends. The grown-up kids were now in Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills, acting out their parts in a grown-up auto industry.

The police officers spread around the two-story home, cutting off any attempted escape. Tim King and Kelly went to the crumbling, but still ornate front door. Repeated knocks brought no response. Kelly jimmied open a frail window easing with the barrel of his service pistol.

Inside was, in effect, a setting for a ghoulish television serial. Cobwebs trailed down the dirty ceiling to drape on to pieces of dusty furniture. In the spacious back rooms, though, a certain measure of cleanliness and order prevailed. King spotted what was apparently an office room, with a roll-top desk, three big wooden file cases, and a corner set-up with a power-machine equipped tool bench.

The roll-top desk was Maurice Rivers's command post, Tim King judged. Its slots and pigeonholes bulged with papers and account books.

He requested Kelly to go back to the prowl car and call central bureau for a photo and brush team. King wanted to wait and be ready if the phone in the desk rang. He also wanted to do some calling himself if he found any likely numbers to call up-state. He was still hipped on the idea of a ring of thieves.

Rapidly, the young detective inventoried the bizarre contents of the room. In one corner was a table piled with newspapers and magazines. This was the clipping section. A file nearby contained dossiers with the names of the top officials of the national auto industry in Detroit. Stuffed in some of the dossiers were newspaper and magazine clippings, containing information on the interests and community activities of the marked people.

Here was the Rivers method, King decided, of learning pertinent things about his present or future victims.

In the tool bench corner, key blanks of various shapes and metals were stacked. The principal device on the work bench was a cutting lathe with precise setting gauges. A heap of catalogs of key companies was on the bench. The man evidently had worked in a modern key factory and knew the art of locks.

The file cases put up a formidable problem, a problem of not wasting time when time was of the essence. The sergeant assigned this problem to Kelly when the plainclothesman returned. Thus, King was free to examine the seemingly all-important roll-top desk.

The contents of the first account book brought a thrill of discovery. Listed neatly were the locations of operations, names and phone numbers of the locals involved, and some current intended victims: "James V. MacCormack—Mengke, Grand Rapids; Clarke V. Bush—White, Flint; Rene Hershman—Murphy, via White, Lansing."

The entry that pleased Tim King most was an old one: "Edward Radfills—B. White, Lansing", with a check mark after it. The mark apparently meant mission accomplished.

The detective was now fairly certain that head man Rivers had received his tip-off on Radfills from the Hotel Hanscomb ex-bellboy, "Bitsie" White.

Kelly now broke into King's concentration on the book.

"Look here," said young Kelly. "What is this? Stage money?" The officer held a dusty bundle of fifty- and hundred-dollar bills.

King laughed. The currency was of the old-fashioned, long-retired large-size bills. Some elderly holder of a safe deposit box had forgotten about it, evidently, and it had been Rivers's luck to pick that particular

box to rob. Now Rivers was stuck with it, for a Federal agency would certainly demand a notarized statement before redeeming the bills.

A second book of records listed payoffs to five men, including White, during the last several months. In this book was a fateful listing: "M.R. account. Marshall Reeves. Belmont Trust. S.D.B. No. 8254. $209,000."

"Marshall Reeves", M.R., Maurice Rivers—it seemed to King to add up. Evidently, as "Mr. Reeves", Maurice Rivers in person was using Belmont Trust for his private holdings.

King considered that Marcus Amsdorf would never ever appreciate the irony of this one.

A third book amounted to a course in penmanship, pure and simple. Each page was headed by a pasted-on signature, some blown up to large size by photostat. Below the page's signature were deft fashionings of prominent curlicues in the calligraphy, followed by complete writing of the original signature, a dozen or more times.

Here was the basis of the Rivers forgery art. But only a great surgeon-scientist would ever be able to explain the man's congenital gift of free, unaided copying at the crucial moment of his contact with Amsdorf.

Tim King decided to make a test of the information on confederates. He instructed Kelly to go to the prowl car and tell central bureau to have the telephone company monitor his open line.

"Mr. Rivers?" an unknown phone voice soon answered King's call to White at what turned out to be a Flint number.

Tim King said in a disguised voice, "I'm calling for Mr. Rivers, Bitsie."

"Who is it? What's the matter? You got a cold?" the voice came over.

"This is Mengke, Grand Rapids," said King. "I'm holding down the fort for Mr. Rivers. He'll be back in an hour or so. Bitsie, he wants to know if you have anything new on van Attelaer. He's ready to move here in Detroit in a few minutes and this is his final check-up. Is our man still at the Flint hotel?"

"Van Attelaer just left, headed for his truck plant outside of town. Everything's okay, like I reported last night."

"Okay, thanks. I'll pass it along to Mr. Rivers. So long—"

"Just a minute, Mengke. I got some troubles of my own. I'm in hot water. Mr. Rivers's contact in L.A. didn't send last month's money order to my wife in Lansing. I got a friend in the neighborhood down there in Lansing, tipping me off. She's liable to go to the police and put in a missing persons search if she runs out of money. She thinks I'm in California. I can't send her any money from here. Will you be sure to leave my message for Mr. Rivers?"

"Sure, White. I got you. Will do. How's it going up in Flint? Better than Lansing?"

"Couldn't be better, Mengke. I got a first class stooge working for me at the Duralmont. He's a whiz at lifting them register cards and cracking out the sigs on the hotel's copying machine." Bitsie White chuckled in appreciation of his protege's skill.

"More power to you, kiddo. So long."

TIM KING hung up and immediately called Captain Hatch on the Rivers phone. From Hatch, he learned that Flint police were right now closing in on Bitsie White, in his rooming house, location of the all-telling telphone.

"The one thing I can't figure out yet," said King to his commander, "is how this wizard Rivers gets the safety box keys he duplicates, like Radfills's."

"Then keep digging," said the captain. "This guy is still standing mute on us, except yelping to phone for bail. I can't stall him off forever. He looks to me like just the type to take his key secret to prison with him. Keep digging, Tim."

In a book of rambling work notes, further data on the Rivers secret came to light less than half an hour later.

"Radfills home, Grosse Points," the scribbled information went, "Thurs. maid's day off. Mrs. R. member Thurs-Noon Lecture Club, Fisher Building. Use plumber rig betw. 12:00—12:30. Kitchen window." A check mark followed. The running progress sheet continued," Key No. 9637. Platen pressed. Solan-Krevlen imprint brass stock." The next notation read, "Lansing. White. Get register card sig. Hotel copying machine okay. White—Rcvd."

Obviously, Maurice Rivers was a man who knew the value of records. Obviously, he did not stoop to common burglary nor to sleight-of-hand. Instead, he borrowed impressions of things in which he was interested and no one was the wiser. When he singled out a prospect, he evidently made sure that the man was normally and happily married —in fact, the kind of man who would not dare to insult his wife by taking out a safe deposit box with only one key, for himself.

The young plain-clothesman made this swift judgment and decided to put the knowledge to practical use at once.

Before reporting back to central bureau, however, he thought it was only fair, for sentimental reasons alone, to bring John K. Baines up to date. He took S.D.B. Key No. 8254 from its envelope pasted in the account book, stopped off at the bank, and placed the key in the executive's hands, in a manner of officially closing the case.

"You and my father were good friends once upon a time," King said. "I've always thought it broke

his heart when Waldo King had to declare bankruptcy and default on loans from you and others. I'm sure he would be proud to have his son do a good turn for his old friends."

Astonished at the revelation, Baines studied key No. 8254 and listened to the details of how the bait plan had worked. For Tim King, there was deep pleasure in making this routine report. For twenty years he had avoided, as best he could, these business and civic leaders of the John K. Baines stripe—not wanting to remind them of his father's fall from financial grace. Now he felt released from such self-imposed exile.

The two men went down to the bank's basement and summoned Marcus Amsdorf. Yes, indeed, Amsdorf said, he had a card on a man named "Marshall Reeves", Key No. 8254. The description read: *slight build, 5' 9", pale face, brown hair, deep voice, very courteous.*

"Open this box, Mr. Amsdorf," ordered Baines. "Let's see if this man courteously left us the two hundred nine thousand dollars."

He had.

But he had left something else more important to John K. Baines than money. He had left, under the sheaf of money, a key without a number and looking surprisingly like a duplicate of the Master Key in Marcus Amsdorf's hand.

King made silent snap judgment: the key was cached here to forestall its discovery in event of the man's flight from his crime headquarters and subsequent police search.

King grasped the key from Amsdorf's hand and matched it with the key from the "Marshall Reeves" box.

The two keys could not be told from one another. Here was the Rivers secret to a second or alternate method of rifling safety deposit boxes.

John K. Baines said, "Amsdorf, how could you let a terrible thing like this happen?"

"Where do you put your master key for safe-keeping?" King harshly said, to jog Amsdorf back to attention from his trance.

"I keep it at home in a wall safe," he said.

"You take the master key out of this bank?" said Baines in a tone of utter disbelief.

"The vault area is protected under electric time lock all night," said Amsdorf. "I never trusted the method. A power failure or faulty mechanism would make it vulnerable. So I keep the key close to me at all times, where I know it to be. If someone got into the vaults, he would find no master key to open anything."

"Except that you offered Maurice Rivers the opportunity on a silver platter to break into your home when you were absent, open your safe, make a wax impression, return your master key to the wall

safe, and make his own duplicate."

"Just like Rivers made a duplicate of Ed Radfills's wife's key," said Baines disgustedly.

"Rivers must have worked up an M.O. on you a long time ago," said King to Amsdorf. "He was probably your final customer on some nights. Look up his visitation record and prove it to yourself. He probably saw you handling the key, putting it into an envelope or a wallet. He next tailed you and verified that you did not leave the key upstairs in the main security vault of the bank with the sacks of cash. He slipped into your home when you and your family were at a show, or a ball game, or otherwise normally absent."

Amsdorf continued to remain silent. Then he walked out of the vault, leaving the two men to sort out the sheaves of hundred-dollar bills.

In a few moments, the still-stunned man returned, with a record card. It showed that "Marshall Reeves" had signed up for the bank service twenty-three months ago and had visited the box several times a month since. King judged that Rivers was thus familiarizing himself with locations of box serial numbers, as well as further studying Amsdorf and his customer list.

"An efficient man," said Tim King, "but fortunately we got him before he was able to go into mass production with his duplicate master key. My guess is that he was storing up a collection of keys for boxes located fairly close to his own. Easier to open without exciting suspicion. Then one day he would raid all of them with his master key. Turn retail crime into wholesale. Meanwhile, he was doing all right for himself."

Baines nodded, as though making a decision. "Tim," he said, "would you consider heading up Security for this bank and its branches —at a salary on the vice-presidential level?"

King reacted with complete silence. The vision of return to opulence was too bright and sudden for him to take in accurately. Police training had made him a cautious man.

After a long pause, Tim King said, "Mr. Baines, I thank you, more than you'll ever know. But let's have things stand right there. Give me a rain check on your offer, if you will. I've still got a lot to learn about this trade. If I make lieutenant, I'll reconsider."

They shook hands on it.

Tim King was very quiet, driving back to Headquarters. But he was smiling tightly. A smile that seemed to say, *This one was for you, Dad. From Timmy—with thanks.*

It was a good feeling.

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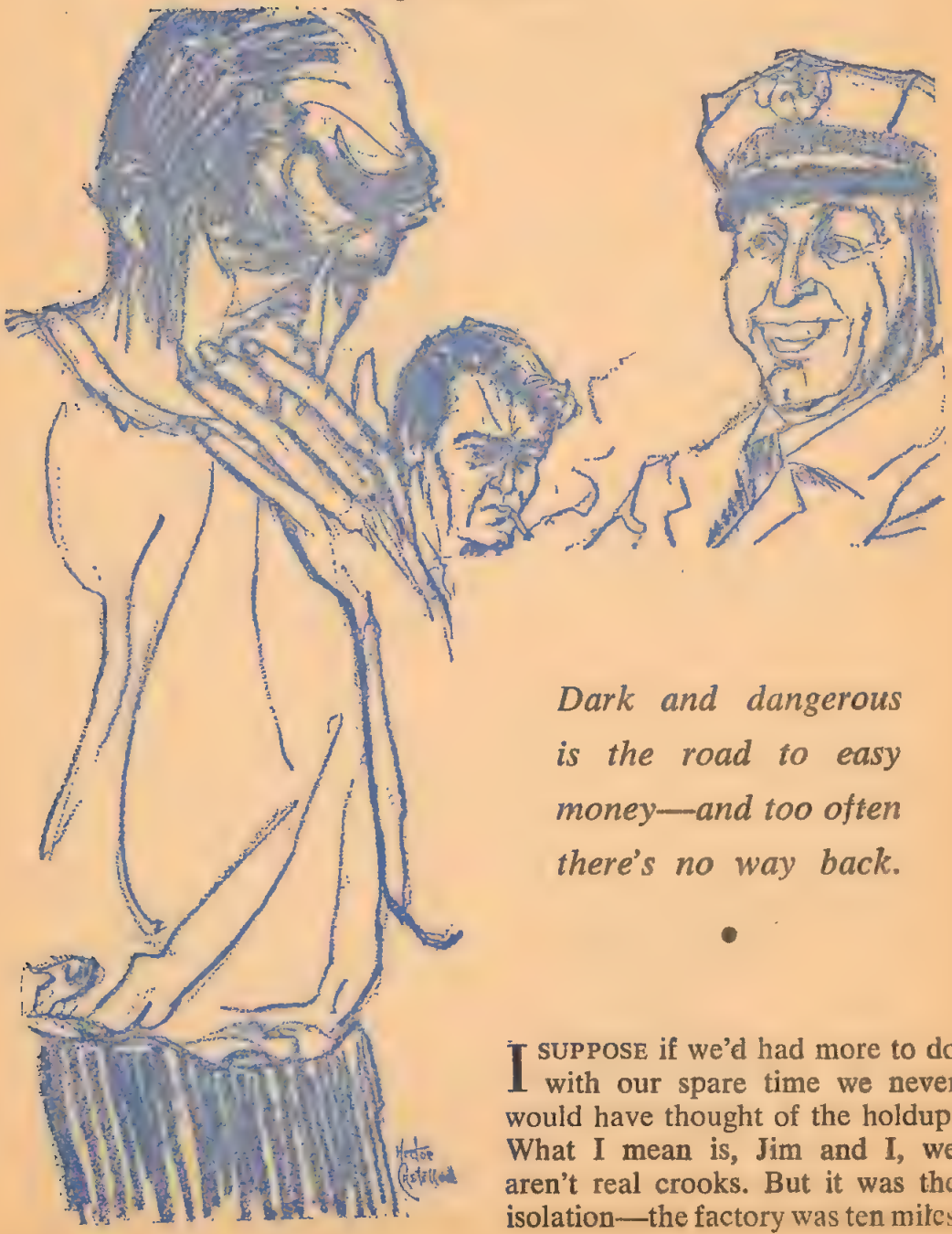
EASY DOUGH

by ED LACY



Dark and dangerous is the road to easy money—and too often there's no way back.

•

I SUPPOSE if we'd had more to do with our spare time we never would have thought of the holdup. What I mean is, Jim and I, we aren't real crooks. But it was the isolation—the factory was ten miles

beyond the outskirts of the city. We just didn't have enough to do to keep us from thinking things we maybe shouldn't.

The work wasn't hard nor skilled; the company manufactured metal cabinets and we ran a power press that stamped out the parts. Because the factory was so far from the city they had to pay $3 an hour to get help. Another good deal was that a lot of the single guys lived in the few houses near the factory.

Jim and I shared a nice, light room in Mrs. Thomas' house, which was right across the road from the plant.

Not only was the room and board cheap and the food great, but if I had to punch in at eight-thirty I could pound my ear right up to eight-fifteen and still be on time. Mrs. Thomas always had the TV on in her living room and didn't mind if we watched it with her. Or we might go over to the employees' lounge, if we were on the night shift and off during the day, and kid around with the office girls.

There was also this little grocery store a half a mile away and we might walk there and have a few beers. You can see it was a great job for saving money. Of course you could always ride a bus into the city and take a subway downtown. But Jim and I usually watched TV, maybe went into the city once a month to see a movie, or take the office gals bowling. Jim was saving to buy a car and I was putting aside my green to go to a trade school and learn air conditioning.

If you worked Saturday, you got a day off during the week, which is how it happened we were strolling down the road on a Wednesday. Now, about two miles from the factory there's a traffic light, because there's a school on a side road. This light is the kind you operate yourself by pressing a button on the light post. In other words, the light is always green until you press the button and then it turns red for a moment.

We were walking down the road and along comes old Mr. Jenkins in his red car. He honked his horn at us and waved as he passed. Mr. Jenkins is a retired cop and each Wednesday he drives into the city for the payroll, which was in cash because there's no place to cash a check near the factory.

We waved back and Jim asked, "How much do you think he's carrying? Has to be at least ten grand."

"More. The big brass knock down fat salaries each week. The good mechanics get almost five dollars an hour. The payroll has to be about fifteen grand."

Jim nodded. "It's crazy—one old ex-cop handling it by himself. Two guys in disguise could wait in the bushes by that traffic light. Soon as they spot Jenkins' red car coming, they press the button. He stops

for the red light and we—well, two guys could easily overpower him and take the payroll. We'd tie the old boy up and make our getaway without anybody getting hurt. Even if the pay here is fine, it sure doesn't compare with making seven thousand five-hundred dollars each for about five minutes work!"

"Come on, Jim. The first thing the cops would do is check on the employees; they'd know it had to be an inside job. We'd be in jail before night. If we ran, it would only be a matter of time before we were picked up."

"Yeah," Jim said thoughtfully. "They'd most certainly check on the help first, especially those that were off on a Wednesday. Still, it's a pushover and worth thinking about."

"You think about it," I said.

"I'm going to. With seven grand each—".

"Jim, if I didn't know better, I'd say you were drunk. We have a soft touch here. I'm content."

The following week we were on the night shift. On those weeks, Jim went into the city often, during the day, while I slept. This week when we had a Tuesday off, Jim insisted I go into town with him. Once in the city, we had to pay three different bus fares before he brought me to a big cement factory.

Pointing to a large shed where some working stiffs were loading bags of cement, Jim said, "I've been asking around. Those bags weigh one hundred pounds and the pay is one dollar and a quarter an hour. The idea is they load down to the end of the shed, then start all over again. It takes about three days to fill the shed, meaning they reach the end on a Wednesday."

"So what do I care? This what you brought me in town for?" I asked, yawning.

Jim said, "Listen carefully. Because this is back-breaking work, if you goof off for a half hour here or there, the boss doesn't kick. Notice that the end of the shed is about one hundred yards from a highway which goes right by our factory. Suppose we quit our jobs and start working here for—"

"Jim, are you out of your skull, giving up a snap job paying three bucks an hour for *this?*"

"Shut up and listen to me, stupid. We work here for, say three months. Then on a Wednesday we rent a car, have it parked near the highway. I've timed it: in thirty-five minutes, tops, we can drive up to that traffic light, disguise ourselves, rob the payroll and be back here. All in about a half an hour!

"If the police ever check on us—and they have no reason to, since we left the employment of the metal factory three months before the hold-up—we have a perfect alibi. Our time cards will prove we were busting our backs here at the time of the robbery. It's foolproof. We have an alibi and no police record. Also in three months nobody at the

factory will even remember us. Then, after a week or so, we pick a fight with the straw boss here, get fired and start spending our loot."

"But three months of hard labor juggling these sacks!"

Jim shrugged his big shoulders. "Sure, it will be hard work, but with the loot we'll be making about a hundred dollars a day for those three months, tax-free! We'll never get an opportunity to pick up a chunk of dough so easy again."

I really don't know why I let Jim talk me into the deal, but it did look like such a cinch! I guess, in the end, I sold myself. We quit our jobs at the factory, saying we had something better lined up. Jim and I got a dingy little room costing us twice what we were paying at Mrs. Thomas', and without meals.

We also had to pay two bus fares each morning and night.

The work was hard and dirty and by the time we had supper in some stool joint and reached our crummy room, I was ready to fall into bed. The other guys on the job were a bunch of hard jokers and I had a couple of fights. I was glad Jim was a tough and burly guy himself.

At the end of the first month I'd lost twenty pounds, not to mention ruining several pairs of shoes, dungarees and sweat shirts. The low wages hardly let me break even, while saving a dime was impossible. I wanted to go up and visit one of the stenos in the factory but Jim said we had to stay away. But I did phone her once or twice, without telling him and she said things were humming up there.

By the end of the second month I was hard as nails and just as lean, but always tired and on edge from lack of sleep. Jim was the same way. What with traveling so far, we were really putting in a twelve-hour day.

Today, when the alarm jerked me out of a sound sleep at four, I turned it off and told Jim, "I've had it. I'm going to call in sick, take it easy today."

"Yeah," Jim mumbled, half-asleep. "We haven't missed a day. We'll tell 'em we ate something bad and have upset stomachs."

We slept until eleven; then went out for breakfast, phoned in sick. We decided to go downtown and take in a cheap movie. Also, Jim wanted to see about renting a car, because we figured on pulling the hold-up in another two weeks.

Coming out of the subway, we were startled to see Mr. Jenkins parking his old red car. He was dolled up in a new, gray, special police uniform. We tried to duck but he saw us, said, "Hello there. You two fellows used to work in the factory, didn't you?"

"That's right, Mr. Jenkins," Jim said. He nodded at the uniform. "How come you're wearing that? Don't you work there any more?"

"I'm still there, but there's been a few changes since you fellows

left. We've expanded. The company opened a cafeteria for its employees and the man who has the concession, he cashes the employees' checks, being he has an armored truck calling for his receipts each morning. It's far easier for the bookkeeping department to pay by check. I'm working there as a guard now. I'm down here to see a uniform company about my cap; it's a bit too tight. Well, I'll be seeing you fellows."

An *armored truck!* I'd put in nearly three months of stupid, hard labor for nothing! Motioning for Jim to follow me, I stepped into the lobby of an office building. As Jim came in, I belted him on the jaw, knocking him down.

I stood there, realizing what I'd done and plenty scared, for Jim is twice my weight and a brawler. He got to his feet slowly, rubbing his chin. I asked, "Jim, I'm sorry, I lost—"

"That's okay kid, I had *that* coming to me. There's only one thing we can do—we're going to wait for Mr. Jenkins and get a ride back to the plant, see if we can get our jobs back!"

COMING SOON:

NIGHTMARE FOR A NIGHT

A Dramatic Spy Story Novelet

by ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

Somewhere in East Berlin a dead man waited to claim me for his own. And the macabre, grinning wraith who escorted me at pistol point craved only one thing—Murder.

FLY AWAY HOME

by JAMES HOLDING

When a two-way crook moves in on a one-way racket—someone is bound to wind up hurt!

I DON'T know to this day whether he was telling me the truth or not.

About the money, I mean. From the label, and the fact that I've heard nothing from him since, I suspect that he was.

As for the other, I'm not so sure. It could easily have been his idea of a joke, fabricated out of whole cloth for my special benefit. For even when we played football together in high school and were the best of friends, he always considered me something of a stuffed shirt.

And he always relished the chance to let a little of my stuffing out when he could.

Knowing him as well as I do, though, I'd guess he was telling me the truth about that, too.

Not about me being a stuffed shirt. About the restaurant thing.

You know how some men feel about their grandchildren? They like them, all right, but they can't stand to have them around for long. They're glad to see them when they meet, but just as glad to see the last of them when they leave.

It's exactly the way I've felt about Yancey for the last ten years.

Yancey's six feet tall and good looking, with dark curly hair, an aristocratic way of carrying himself, and a couple of ice blue eyes like rifle barrels. He has a high-

pitched, carrying voice, too—perfect for making signals heard over the crowd noise when he played quarterback on our high school team.

He was a good quarterback. Smart and resourceful. Helped us to win the state title two years in a row. In those days, what our big slow-witted linemen (like me) admired the most about Yancey was his instinct for deception, the way he always seemed able to come up with just the right tricky play when we needed one real bad. Oh, yes, Yancey's quite a man.

There's only one thing wrong with him.

He's a bum. An ingratiating, sometimes beguiling bum, of course. But a bum, all the same. Our high school year book blueprinted his future as the boy most likely to succeed. He hasn't followed the blue-print.

He's turned out to be the most bone-lazy, selfish, indifferent, improvident, unashamed, unethical, not to say crooked, player of angles ever graduated from our common alma mater. A deadbeat. A petty grifter, a sponger, a minor irritant operating on the very fringes of the law. That's Yancey. He's never even had enough courage, or initiative, or whatever it takes, to become involved in major dishonesty.

Unless, of course, he *was* telling the truth about the money.

Anyway, I got back to my office about two-thirty that Wednesday after making my hospital rounds. I was still new enough in the doctoring business to get a charge out of my name on the door with an M.D. after it. My nurse-secretary didn't give me much time to admire it, though. She said, "Mr. Yancey called, Doctor. He'll be in to see you at four o'clock, or as near to four as you can see him."

I groaned. I was thinking, with half my mind, that I was in for another hundred dollar touch from my old teammate; yet with the other half, I was thinking it would be fun to see old Yancey again. He hadn't been in my office since I'd lent him the last hundred a month ago.

I said he was kind of a beguiling bum, didn't I? Now you see what I mean.

In spite of his unlovely characteristics and his admitted indifference to what I thought of him, I still liked Yancey. Our old football friendship has something to do with it, I suppose. I'm something of a sucker for sentiment, as well as a stuffed shirt. Or maybe it was because Yancey made me feel slightly guilty about my own success in the face of his complete lack of it.

Anyway, I still liked him enough to lend him money which I knew he'd never return. Also to try to point out to him the error of his ways. The last time I'd remonstrated with him (as I gave him a

hundred dollars) he'd merely grinned at me and said, "Still the same old stuffed shirt, aren't you, Jimmy? But thanks for the century. I'll pay you back next week."

I didn't mind his coming to the office to see me. One thing about Yancey, he always looks presentable enough, even distinguished. As he's told me himself, when he sits among my other patients in my waiting room, he actually lends tone to the place. He'd rather starve, or borrow money from me, than wear soiled or shabby clothes.

So I told my nurse okay, I thought I could see Yancey around four, and did we have a hundred dollars in our cash box?

We did. But as things turned out, we didn't need it.

Yancey came in about half an hour late, as might be expected. Through the closed door between us, I could hear him kidding with my nurse in her little office for a minute. Then he beat a tattoo on my consulting room door with his fingers and came in before I could even call to him that it was all right.

"Hi, Jimmy," he greeted me, as though he saw me three times a day, "How's the poor man's Dr. Kildare?"

"I'm going to live," I answered, smiling at him in spite of myself. "How are you?"

"Better than usual, Jimmy. Much better than usual, I'm glad to say."

"What's that supposed to mean?" He was always healthy as a horse.

"Just what I say. I'm on top of the world today. The very top."

"How come?"

"I got my big break today, Jimmy. The really big one every man waits for. Three hours ago. I wanted you to be the first to know. My old buddy." He simpered at me.

He really did seem to be in a

state of unusual exhilaration. I said, "Well, congratulations, Yancey. Take off your coat and tell me about it."

He shrugged out of his topcoat, a gabardine affair in cool beige that he wore with his usual flair.

"It isn't my coat," he said, "but I'll take it off if you say so." He threw it across a chair.

"It isn't your coat?"

"Nope. That's part of my lucky break. I'll tell you about it in a minute. But first, let me settle my just debts."

He pulled a slab of bills out of his inside jacket pocket thick enough to pass for a thin green brick, and peeled off six bills from the top. He laid them with a loving pat on the top of my desk. "There

you are, Doctor," he said gravely. "That about evens us up, I think. Unless you charge interest on your loans? I wouldn't put it past you, at that." They were all hundreds.

I was too amazed to do anything but push my lower jaw back into place.

He clasped his hands behind his neck and directed his gun-barrel eyes at me. They were dancing and sparkling like sun on glare ice if glare ice ever looks blue. "Aren't you going to thank me?"

"Sure. Thanks a million. What bank did you rob?"

"No bank. You can take the money without a single qualm."

"Gimme, then," I said, stowing the C-notes in my desk drawer. "I doubt that, but I'll take it anyway. At least for now. I never expected to see this dough again."

"I never expected to see it even once." He laughed with pure delight.

I stared at him. "Where'd you get it, Yancey? Stop playing the big mystery man. Did you inherit it?"

"In a way."

"Well, for God's sake, that *is* a break! Who from?"

"*Whom* from," Yancey said with his big smile. "You never were much in English, were you, Doc?"

"Good enough to tell the difference between the pronouns 'his' and 'mine'," I said, "which is more than you can do, Yancey. You stole this dough, didn't you?"

He slipped the big deck of bills back into his pocket and said again, "In a way. I suppose you'd call it that."

"How about telling me the truth and letting me decide for myself what I'd call it? Come on. I've got patients waiting."

He shook his head. "Your waiting room's as empty as a liar's promise. You've got plenty of time, Jimmy. Relax. And let me tell you why this has been the luckiest day of my entire cotton-picking life, will you? I've got to tell somebody or bust."

"Tell me, then. But quick. Before you dirty up my office."

"Okay, Fatso. There's nobody more surprised than me that things turned out lucky today. The day didn't start out lucky, I can tell you that. Just the opposite, in fact. It started out lousy. Even lousier than usual."

"In what way?"

"Don't rush me. It still makes me a little queasy to think about it."

"So don't think about it, tell about it," I said. "Or let me give you a stomachic. I'm a doctor, remember?"

"A what?"

"A stomachic. Something that's good for your stomach. You probably need it."

"Whiskey?"

"Definitely not.

"Then thank you, no. No stomachic. I'll try to control my own

nausea. I got up late this morning on purpose."

"Why?"

"I always do. So I can eat breakfast and lunch at the same time. Brunch. It's cheaper that way. But you wouldn't know that. You're rich."

"Pardon me all to hell. Please go on with your fascinating story, Mr. Yancey."

"That's better, Doc. As I say, it makes me a little sick to remember it. It would you, too, so don't get that patronizing look on your beat-up face, Jimmy. Why, I wonder, do tackles always get their noses broken?" He shrugged. "Anyway, I went over to Morrisey's Restaurant for brunch about one o'clock, wearing my topcoat because it turned cold last night."

"Morrisey's is a pretty fancy restaurant," I said, meaning for him.

He gave me a look. "That's the best kind. I hung my coat on the coat rack near the cashier's desk and found a table by myself along one side. The joint was pretty well filled. I ordered chicken pot pie and was almost finished eating it when I saw something floating in the bottom of my casserole in the chicken gravy." He shuddered. "I mean, Jimmy, after I'd eaten almost the whole thing, to find something like that in the gravy!"

"Something like what? What was it?"

He took a breath. "It was a ladybug. And take my word for it, she looked plenty red against that yellow chicken gravy! Also plenty dead. She had her wings spread out like she had been making a last desperate try to get the hell out of that casserole before she was covered with dough and baked in the oven! Do you blame me for feeling like heaving?"

I grinned. "No," I said. "But it could have been worse. A cockroach, say."

"All right. You think it was a joke." He was indignant. "So forget it. I wouldn't even mention it, except that in a crazy way, the dead ladybug was responsible for my big break."

He paused with a hurt look on his face until I apologized for interrupting and asked him to continue.

He said, "I called my waiter over and pointed out the ladybug in the gravy. It shook him up pretty bad, too. He began to wave his hands and explain that such a thing had never happened at Morrisey's before. Then, for God's sake, he offered to bring me another chicken pot pie! Can you believe it? I told him it was all I could do to keep down the one I'd swallowed already. I wasn't about to eat another one that might have *two* dead insects in it, for all I knew."

Picturing the scene in Morrisey's Restaurant, I couldn't keep from laughing. Yancey didn't often get

offended, I knew, but when he did, he got very offended indeed.

"I guess I must have raised my voice a little," Yancey went on, "because the people at the tables around mine began to turn their heads my way."

"No wonder," I said, remembering Yancey's signal-calling voice.

"Anyway, in about three seconds flat the manager of the joint—maybe it was Morrisey himself, for all I know—came galloping up. He waved my waiter to one side and whispered that unless I lowered my voice, and please, please, accepted his abject apologies for the ladybug, I'd ruin his restaurant and I didn't want to do that, did I?

"I told him I didn't give a damn whether I ruined his business or not, I wasn't used to ladybugs in my pot pie. But I *did* lower my voice, the poor guy seemed so upset. I let him escort me to the door, tearing up my lunch check on the way, and still apologizing like crazy. He asked me if I had a coat, and I said yes, and pointed to it hanging on the rack by the cashier's desk. He was so anxious to get me out of his restaurant without a scene that he pulled the wrong coat off the rack and helped me into it.

"It was the same color as mine. The same material. And it fit me all right. It was several years newer than mine, too. So I didn't correct his mistake. That's it over there."

Yancey jerked a thumb at the topcoat on my office chair, and gave me his punch line. "It had seventeen thousand dollars in cash in the right hand pocket," he said. "In a brown envelope." Dramatically he paused and looked at me in triumph.

I gulped. "You're kidding, Yancey! I hope. If not, you can't *keep* the coat and the money! They're not yours!"

"That's true," he said calmly, watching me. "They're not mine. And whose do you think they are?"

"Whose?"

"Big Al Martine's. Ever hear of him?"

"Ye-e-s, I think so."

"He's a racketeer. Biggest in the city. Up to his neck in dope, numbers, girls, everything crooked we've got here. This money is *dirty* money, Jimmy, real dirty, if it's his. And it's his. His name's on the label inside the topcoat pocket. The way I see it, I got as much right to money like this as Big Al has. He must have been on the way to the bank when he stopped off for lunch." Yancey chuckled. "Seventeen grand! In cash! And a practically new topcoat besides!" He went on chortling and congratulating himself, but he kept a sharp eye on me, I noticed.

Finally he stopped his play-acting and said to me, "You're not going to turn fink on me, are you, Jimmy? I didn't need to tell you this, remember. I didn't need to

pay you back your six C's. But I thought you'd enjoy the gag. Are you going to blow it for me?"

I thought about it a minute. Then I said, "Let me see the label in the coat."

He went over and brought the coat to me, turning the inside pocket out to show me the label sewn to the pocket lining. Martine's name was there all right, written in blue ink.

"See?" Yancey said.

I nodded. "What about your own topcoat? Was *your* name in *it*?"

"That's the first thing I asked myself after I found the dough. You think I'm stupid? The answer is no. My topcoat had another guy's name in it. No sweat."

"Another guy's? Did you steal that one, too?"

"I won it in a crap game. And the guy who owned it is dead. Word of honor."

"Well," I said, "that leaves the restaurant manager. He'll describe you to Martine."

"Let him. I've been hiding in a blonde's walk-up I happen to have the key to, ever since. And I'm leaving town tonight, going a long way off. He'll never find me, Jimmy. Satisfied?"

"No. You ought to return the coat and money, Yancey. Even if it *is* Martine's. You know that as well as I do." I hesitated. "But I must admit I don't feel too strongly about it, though."

"That's my good old reliable stuffed shirt," Yancey said approvingly. "It isn't as though Big Al was going to starve to death without the money in this coat."

"I guess he won't."

"I *know* he won't. If he got my topcoat at Morrisey's in exchange for his, he'll find something in *my* pocket, too.

"What?"

"Most of my capital. In fact all of it."

"Capital? I didn't know you had any."

He sniffed. "Enough to take care of three square meals a day for awhile, anyway."

"Yeah," I said scathingly, "at the Salvation Army."

"Oh, no. At the best damn restaurants in town."

I looked at him. I could tell he was leading up to something. But I just couldn't help asking the question.

"What *did* you leave in your own topcoat pocket, Yancey?"

He gave me his best grin.

"Three more ladybugs and a housefly," he said.

TIPOFF

by ARNOLD ENGLISH

Who could he be, that shadowy night prowler who knew about murders too well in advance . . ?

GORDON JANES hurried over to his desk in the tail end of the *Bulletin* city room. He brushed aside a stack of copy paper and part of yesterday's re-plate of the early bird edition to grab for the ringing phone and snap out his name.

A man's voice asked flatly, "Does your paper pay for news tips?"

"We pay as soon as a tip is confirmed," Gordon said, reaching for a pencil next to the notepaper he always kept close at hand. "The gorier the better; and it's got to be fresh, of course."

"Go to number Seventeen Florida Street, and you'll see that there've been some robberies." The informant paused. "Send a check to John Berry, One-twenty-nine Westwater Street."

Gordon's city editor agreed that the story might be worth checking out. At the Florida Street address, he discovered that a number of affluent looking passersby had been robbed and were comiserating with one another.

Not one of them had clearly seen the man who had committed the crimes.

Gordon saved valuable time for the paper by phoning his office for a secretary and 'talking' the story

to her. It showed up intact in next day's paper.

There was another phone call from flat-voiced John Berry the next afternoon. "If I give you more tips, do I get extra money for each one?"

"We pay top prices for murder exclusives," Gordon said, "but we pay well for any good story."

"No murder this time," Berry told him. "Do you know the northeast corner of Florida Street and Grayman Avenue? Well, the corner building is on fire."

Gordon took the best cameraman with him to cover this one, a crackerjack operator called Rosen. As usual the lensman got some first rate shots of the burning building and the people who watched stolidly while wealthy residents evacuated it in various kinds of disorder.

The boss fire-eater watched the flames angrily.

"This damn fire broke so fast," he told Gordon, "it looks to me like arson."

Gordon's story, as the cityside men said, was good enough to give the Pulitzer boys a hard time before they handed over the prize money to somebody else. The pictures, of course, were well up to Rosen's high standards.

John Berry's third phone call two nights later was just as businesslike as the other ones had been. "I want one hundred dollars for every tip from now on."

"We'll give top rates for good newstips," Gordon said. "Maybe we'll even triple the payoff on a murder."

John Berry took a deep sighing breath. "There's been a mugging at Twenty-Eight Florida Street. A man was hit five times."

Gordon and Rosen got to the Florida Street address ahead of the cops for the first time in either man's experience. The mugging victim's bloody face looked like a peach pit. He wiped his face with an expensive and initialled handkerchief.

"A man came up to me and asked for a match. When I took out my lighter, I was hit and then the man scooted away. He must think he killed me, he hit me so hard with a club."

"He hit you five times, didn't he?"

"I don't remember. Who told you that?"

Gordon asked a different question, but he was thoughtful. He phoned in his story and drove down to One-Twenty-Nine Westwater Street to see if the elusive Mr. Berry lived at the mailing address he'd given to Bordon. Mr. Berry didn't. Nobody he talked to had ever heard of John Berry. The janitor said that any letter with a strange name would be placed for a day in a spot above the mailbox, and it could be picked up easily enough by whoever wanted it.

The shadowy John Berry certainly matched that description.

Gordon explained what was on his mind when he talked to the city editor. "This guy is going to do the big one for the money we give him for news tips. He always works at night and along Florida Street, and a crack reporter-photographer team can get the story of the year: '*Bulletin* Witnesses Murder Attempt'!"

"How can you be sure you'll get him?"

"Leave it to me."

Gordon and his partner, Rosen, drove along Florida Street later that night. "If I get in trouble, take a few ultra-violet pictures and then help me out."

He stepped into the spring night before Rosen could answer him, arrogantly moving the cane he'd insisted on for the job, and the glossily expensive tux that belonged with it. This was going to be one whale of a news story, he told himself exultantly, the best of his career.

Ten minutes had gone by when he saw a shadowy figure emerge from a street telephone box. Instantly, Gordon's senses were whipped to alertness.

He was aware of somebody walking stealthily back of him and turned with a fist out and the cane held high. The stranger swooped on him, bringing hard hands up around his throat.

Gordon tried to pull the hands off. The cane, as a weapon of self-defense, was useless to him, of course. He saw light and darkness, stars and comets. Through a mind-mist he could see Rosen taking photographs by ultra-violet light, and he'd have given anything to be able to grab for the gun in his pocket.

The stranger was using that club by the time Rosen reached them, and the tide of battle slowly turned against Gordon's desperate assailant. . . .

"I'd have bet odds you wouldn't get him," Gordon's city editor said after the story had been wrapped up.

"I felt the same way," Gordon assured him, taking off the rumpled and expensive jacket. "I had some insurance, though."

"You'd better explain that, Gordon."

"Well, I had noticed that John Berry was very anxious to get his money and that all the victims were rich, so I figured that if I dressed expensively and prowled his area, I'd find him." Gordon sighed. "All I had to do was to look in a street phone booth, and I had enough time to get ready for him. It stood to reason that he'd be in a hurry to call up the paper with the news tip about murder taking place on Florida Street and the victim being a man in a tuxedo."

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